GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HOW CHILDREN EXPERIENCE, EXPLAIN, AND COPE WITH BULLYING

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Nicole Lise Rosen

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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HOW CHILDREN EXPERIENCE, EXPLAIN, AND COPE WITH BULLYING

Nicole Lise Rosen

Dissertation

Approved:	Accepted:
_____ Advisor Dr. Stacey Nofziger	_____ Department Chair Dr. Matthew Lee
_____ Committee Member Dr. Robert Peralta	_____ Interim Dean of the College Dr. John C. Green
_____ Committee Member Dr. Kathryn Feltey	_____ Dean of the Graduate School Dr. Chand L. Midha
_____ Committee Member Dr. Matthew Lee	_____ Date
_____ Committee Member Dr. Clare Stacey	
_____ Committee Member Dr. Jennifer Milam	

ABSTRACT

Getting pushed around and teased is often considered "normal" behavior for school-aged children. However, bullying is a form of abuse and scholars have worked at great lengths to understand, intervene, and prevent the behavior. Despite good intentions, such attempts have not eradicated bullying and students continue to be victimized by their peers. This study offers new insight on the sex and gender differences of bullying behavior by incorporating a sociological and feminist lens. As a result, bullying is understood as behavior that is shaped by larger social institutions, primarily gender. Three key areas of interest are examined including, the sex and gender differences of why students are targeted, how they write about their experiences, and the different coping strategies used. Data for this study came from a national survey, The Youth Voice Project. By examining open-ended questions, this qualitative content analysis provides a number of important findings regarding sex and gender differences in the experiences of bullying amongst middle school students. Findings indicate that bullying is sexualized and gendered, with girls experiencing victimization both from other girls and from boys that focuses on real or imagined sexual activity. Boys experience gender harassment as a result of their real or perceived sexual orientation. Also, boys' lack of in-depth responses may be strategized ways of maintaining their control and negating their victim status, while girls' storytelling methods reflect lessons learned in gender socialization. Lastly, girls' use of adaptive coping strategies is likely to help dissuade future incidences of

bullying from occurring. Meanwhile, boys' maladaptive strategies warrant further examination, particularly the frequency of using humor to cope with bullying. Implications for educators conclude this study, suggesting the importance of fostering a positive school climate, implementing restorative justice values within schools, and funding nation-wide mentor programs.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the two strong women in my life who never give up on me - my Mom and Shoney. And to Opa – now there are two Ph.D.'s in the family!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over time, there has been increased attention to bullying in schools across the U.S. However, despite several efforts that have attempted to understand the phenomena through research, stop future incidences of bullying through prevention programs, or address current cases of bullying with zero-tolerance programs, school aged children continually report being victimized by their peers (Sullivan 2011). To adequately address the problem of bullying in schools, researchers, educators, and parents would be best served if they considered not only the characteristics of bullies and victims, but also the larger structures that shape children's behavior. Specifically, gender plays a large role in how children experience, explain, and respond to being victimized by their peers. My goal within this dissertation is to shed light on how the interaction between bullies and victims is shaped by the institution of gender. Specifically, the aim of this dissertation is to examine how, based on gender socialization, girls and boys experience, interpret, and cope with bullying differently. By uncovering and understanding these gendered differences, prevention programs may be better able to remedy bullying by considering how traditional gender roles influences the continuation of bullying.

Much of what we know about bullying has come from psychologists, social psychologists, and educators. While such contributions have offered salient knowledge on characteristics of bullies and victims, as well as offering various remedies, such

focuses have lacked attention to the interplay between macro and micro levels of interaction. This study fills that gap by offering a sociological and feminist analysis of bullying behavior. Specifically, this study focuses on the macro level by examining gender as a social institution, as well as the micro level by focusing on how girls and boys interpret and cope with being victimized. Examining bullying from a sociological and feminist lens has the potential to shed light on the larger social structures that play a vital role in the construction of bullying behavior. This also helps explain how micro level interactions are shaped by larger structures, which may solidify or challenge gender inequalities. Given that gender and bullying are two key concepts in the dissertation, I first introduce the notion of gender socialization followed by a discussion of bullying behavior. I then provide an overview of the data used for this project, followed by an overview of the chapters. The preceding chapters explore the topics of gender and bullying more thoroughly.

Gender Socialization

Gender inequalities exist at individual, institutional, and societal wide levels. Remedying these inequalities requires us to consider their origin, as well as how gender differences play out in personal interactions and within larger institutions. The terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often conflated in many disciplines, however sociologists often draw attention to their distinctions. Sex refers to the biological differences between women and men (i.e. female and male), whereas gender is the social and cultural construction of the behaviors and norms that are expected of someone based on their sex

(i.e. femininity and masculinity) (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). Gender is not constructed equally. Overwhelmingly, masculine and feminine traits are pinned as polar opposites, referred to as the gender binary (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). Furthermore, masculine traits are often valued over feminine traits, known as gender ranking (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). Gender distinctions are learned early on in the socialization process and reinforced throughout the life course.

Feminist theorists have offered varying theories to better understand gender differences, including examining gender as a performance (West and Zimmerman 1987), as intersecting with race and class (Collins 1990; hooks 1981), or the intersection of sexuality, primarily compulsory heterosexuality, with gender (Rich 1980). Though insightful, such theories primarily define gender as something we "do". Extending on such theories, Patricia Yancey Martin (2004) and Judith Lorber (1994) urge sociologists and feminists to conceptualize gender as a social institution. Framing gender as a social institution enables us to consider how gender persists over time, is laden with conflict, is composed of active agents, and is internalized by group members (Martin 2004). Lorber (1994:15) simply summarizes, "As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives." For instance, gender distinctions and patterns exist in the family, workforce, and rules about sexuality (Lorber 1994).

Embodying and enacting the prescribed patterns and rules of the social institution of gender is not, however, innate. These norms are learned through gender socialization. One's social location in society is influenced by the degree of power and privilege they are ascribed. Social inequalities are therefore a result of the socially constructed dimensions, which warrant privilege to some groups and marginalize others. In regards to

gender, children are often socialized into specific gender norms that align with their sex category (Lorber 1994). Privilege and marginalization are perpetuated through the continuation of the gender binary and gender ranking. Girls and boys are often socialized to be exclusively feminine or masculine (respectfully), which reinforces the gender binary (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). As a result, boys who embody masculine traits are ranked above girls and any person who embodies feminine traits (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994).

While early markers of gender differences are evident soon after birth (such as names, clothing, and toys), such differences greatly shape how we interact with one another throughout our lives (such as through language and social control). Examining this process is worthy of further investigation, since gender inequality exists at the micro-levels (i.e. sexual harassment), meso-levels (i.e. inequality in sports), and macro-levels (i.e. gender pay gap). Therefore, gender differences learned early in life have the potential to solidify or challenge gender inequalities later in life. One salient interaction that many school-aged children experience is bullying, which is inherently gendered.

Bullying Behavior

While present in the workplace (Salin 2003; Wheeler and Baron 1994), much research has examined the frequency of bullying amongst school-aged children (Sullivan 2011). Bullying has been recognized as a public health concern and within American schools, it is recognized as the primary form of aggression experienced by students (Sanders and Phye 2004). To best understand this phenomenon, we must first consider

the definition of bullying and how this influences reports and perceptions of the prevalence of bullying amongst young people.

Defining Bullying

Norway researcher Dan Olweus is considered the "father" of bullying research. His extensive research in Norway spearheaded universal attention to children "mobbing" or bullying their peers. As defined by Olweus (1993), bullying is any behavior that is unwanted aggression that occurs repeatedly and overtime, and often involves an imbalance of power. While this definition is used by many researchers today, including myself, the definition is not without its flaws.

For instance, serious acts of aggression and sexual harassment are not considered bullying if the behavior only happens once (Finkelhor et al. 2011). Meanwhile, some children are likely to categorize *any* negative behavior as bullying, regardless of the frequency of such accounts (Finkelhor et al. 2011). Children who taunt, tease, or threaten their peers are undeniably "mean," but some children may categorize a single incident of mockery as bullying. There is not always a clear imbalance of power, as evident in the frequency of relational aggression found in girls' friendships (see Simmons 2002). In addition to discrepancies in Olweus' definition of bullying, the term "bully" itself does not readily translate to other languages and therefore the term may have different meanings within various cultures (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, and Liefooge 2002).

While children may consider all sorts of "wrong" behavior as bullying, educators, researchers, parents, and law enforcement often rely on concrete definitions. For instance, children may shrug off what may be perceived with great alarm by parents and educators.

Or, what might appear as a malicious threat may not be considered a crime by law enforcement (this is especially apparent in incidences of cyberbullying) (see Hinduja and Patchin 2010). Indeed, reaching a common definition of bullying is still of great concern for many researchers (Finkelhor et al. 2011; Hamburger et al. 2011). Some researchers caution adults and children from using the term 'bully', since it may reinforce stigma against a child (Smith et al. 2002). Researchers also acknowledge that many children who bully their peers are victims themselves, often victimized by their parent(s), sibling(s), or other children (Olweus 1993). Therefore, while a child may be a bully in one setting, she or he may be a victim in other situations. In an attempt to reach common ground, the terms peer mistreatment, peer aggression, and peer victimization are often used in place of bullying (see Finkelhor et al. 2011). While often defaulting to Olweus' definition, these terms avoid reinforcing stigma and are more inclusive of "inappropriate" behavior that may not perfectly fit within Olweus' definition (i.e. pertaining to frequency and power imbalance).

Scope of Bullying

Given the discrepancy in Olweus' (1993) definition, researchers, educators, and parents must consider how studies that report the prevalence of bullying may be skewed. Various studies may have relied on different definitions of bullying, and therefore the reported rates and prevalence of incidences may be inflated or deflated. Despite this, general trends of the frequency and types of bullying are documented throughout various studies.

Nationally, of students in 6-12 grade, 28% reported being bullied in the last school year (stopbullying.gov 2014). Within high school alone (9-12th grade), 20% reported being bullied. Roughly 30% of students admitted to bullying others and approximately 70% reported seeing bulling behavior at their schools (stopbullying.com 2014). While it may appear that bullying is a grave concern and a growing epidemic, some studies suggest otherwise.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2015), there has been a gradual decline in reported incidences of bullying since 2005, amongst students aged 12 to 18 years old. For instance, 29-33% of girls ages 12-18 reported being bullied in previous years, yet in 2013, approximately 24% of girls reported the same behavior (NCES 2015). While the decline rates are similar for girls and boys, girls still reported slightly higher rates of bullying compared to boys (NCES 2015). Despite reports that bullying in schools may be declining, the behavior still demands attention and action.

Types of Bullying

The literature on bullying often identifies two different types of bullying; direct and indirect (Olweus 1993). Direct forms of bullying are categorized as physical aggression, including kicking, hitting, choking, or pulling hair (Sullivan 2011). Indirect bullying, sometimes referred to as relational aggression, includes non-verbal psychological bullying (Espelage et al. 2004; Fried and Fried 1994; Osterman et al. 1998; Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Sullivan 2011). Relational aggression includes deliberately

ignoring, isolating, or excluding someone (Espelage et al. 2004; Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Sullivan 2011).

Characteristics of Bullies and Victims

When compared to their peers, bullies are often characterized as being more impulsive and assertive, whereas victims are often identified as being more timid and lacking a strong support system with peers (see Sullivan 2011). Many children who bully are also victims, referred to as victim/bully within the literature (Olweus 1993). Victims are targeted for an array of reasons, including their gender presentation, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, appearance, or disabilities (mental or physical) (Sullivan 2011).

Girls and boys are similarly at risk of being victims of bullying. However, a distinction is that boys often target girls and boys, whereas girls often target other girls (Ringrose and Renold 2010). This may reflect gender differences pertaining to socialization (explained in Chapter II). Generally, boys report higher rates of partaking in physical violence and girls often cite incidences of experiencing relational aggression (Meyer 2009; Sullivan 2011). Males are perceived as being more aggressive than females (Espelage et al. 2004), and therefore are considered the main culprits and victims of bullying (Crick and Grotpeter 1995). This may be attributed to the visibility of bullying amongst boys. Physical forms of aggression are easily identified, therefore adults can more readily respond when they see boys hitting or kicking one another (Simmons 2002). Meanwhile, girls who use relational forms of aggression as much more subtle and often

go undetected by adults (Simmons 2002). There is growing evidence that suggests that girls are victimized at higher rates than boys (NCES 2015; Simmons 2002).

The Youth Voice Project

Data for this study come from the Youth Voice Project, a national survey on bullying. The Youth Voice Project was devised by Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon (2014) and was intended to gather insight on bullying behavior amongst school-age children, including the types, rates, and severity of reported cases. By gathering perspectives of children, the study's overall intent was to consider how anti-bullying efforts might cultivate resiliency, strengthen communities and schools, foster a sense of connectedness in schools, and reduce the frequency of mean behaviors in schools (Davis and Nixon 2014). Thirty-one schools in 12 states across the U.S. participated in the Youth Voice Project, with a total of 13,177 participants. Schools were recruited by word of mouth or email and any school that wanted to participate was included in the sample. The study was approved by the Institute Review Board and was not funded by any grants. The Youth Voice Project consisted of an anonymous online survey through SurveyMonkey. Children whose parents or guardians opted out of the survey were excluded from the study. Children whose parents or guardians gave consent were administered the survey at their school in the fall of 2010. Teachers were available during this time to offer technical and reading support if needed. For feasibility, many schools had students (in the same grade) take the survey together in the same room, at the same time (for a complete

explanation of The Youth Voice Project, see Davis and Nixon 2014).

In the beginning of the survey, students were informed that the Youth Voice Project is an anonymous survey and all of their responses would be confidential. If students did not give consent, they were immediately directed to the end of the survey, thanking them for their time. Students who gave consent where first prompted with demographic questions (such as sex, age, grade, race, and connectedness to school). Students were then asked if and how often they experienced bullying at school. Approximately 3,000 (one-fourth) of the participants reported having experienced physical or relational aggression at least twice a month or more in the past month (Davis and Nixon 2014). These students were directed to a series of questions that pertained to their experiences. The remaining students were directed to the end of the survey, which included questions about being a bystander of bullying behavior.

The survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete and consisted of 33 multiple-choice questions and 12 open-ended questions. The sample consisted of students ranging in age from 11 to 19. Ten percent of participants were in elementary school (5^{th} grade), 57 percent were in middle school (6^{th} – 8^{th} grade), and 33 percent were in high school (9^{th}-12^{th} grade). The sample was evenly split by sex. Fourteen percent of the sample identified as "other" or did not report their race, whereas 3 percent were Native American, 4 percent were Asian American, 7 percent identified as Multiracial, 8 percent were African American, 14 percent were Hispanic American, and 50 percent were White. Eight percent of the sample indicated they received help from special education and 7 percent reported having a physical disability. Students who reported they received reduced or free hot lunches at school or were eligible for free or reduced lunch composed

31 percent of the sample (Davis and Nixon 2014).

The current study is based on responses to three open-ended questions from middle-school girls and boys. One question used for this study was,

> If you feel comfortable, please describe what happened to you. Because this is a confidential survey, please also tell an adult you trust at school about what happened if you have not already done that. Please do not include any names.

Responses from this question offered insight and some in-depth accounts into the types of bullying by girls and boys. This question was used for Chapters II and III. Chapter IV used responses to the following consecutive questions;

> Overall, what did you do that helped the most?
>
> What happened when you did that?

Responses to these questions offered insight into the different types of coping techniques that girls and boys thought worked the best to pacify incidences of bullying. The specific characteristics of the samples used for this study are included in each chapter.

Overview of Chapters

Each chapter is an article that contributes to the literature on bullying by offering a sociological and feminist analysis of how gender influences student's experiences and responses to bullying experiences. This dissertation is organized into three distinct articles intended for publication. To satisfy the formatting guidelines for this dissertation however, references are compiled at the end of the document. Chapter II consists of my first article, "Gender Differences in How Girls and Boys Interpret Their Experiences of Being Bullied". This article examines differences in why girls and boys are targets for

bullying. Findings from this article align with previous study; girls primarily experienced relational aggression whereas boys were victims of physical aggression. Drawing from Martin and Lorber's theory of gender as a social institution, this article examines how gender shapes how children experience bullying. Specifically, boys who sexually harassed girls were affirming their heterosexuality and masculinity while simultaneously reinforcing girls' secondary status. Such behaviors are shaped by the larger structure of gender.

Chapter III includes my second article, " 'Words Speak Louder than Actions': The Connection Between Gendered Language and Bullying Behavior". This article explores how children describe and interpret their experiences of being bullied. Specifically, I examine how respondent's written accounts of bullying differ by sex, both in the sheer quantity of words used and the ways they conveyed their stories. These sex differences are interpreted by relying on insight from sociolinguistics and gender socialization. In short, girls were very verbose in their responses, whereas boys offered fewer and shorter answers. Considering how gender and language socialization shapes children's ways of processing their experiences of being victimized may offer current anti-bullying advocates a deeper understanding of the interplay of language and gender.

In the following chapter, " 'Standing Up or Joking Around': Gendered Differences in Coping With Bullying," I examine how coping strategies used by girls and boys differ. For instance, girls relied on their peers and mothers as social support, while boys used humor to diffuse confrontations with bullying. The tendency for girls and boys to use different coping techniques is influenced by their gender socialization; girls have been socialized to value relationships whereas boys often use humor as a means of

gaining status within their peer groups. However, various coping strategies may diffuse or exacerbate future incidences of bullying. This article concludes with concrete recommendations for educators and adults, who may be seeking to teach children adaptive coping strategies.

In Chapter IV, I conclude by offering an analytical summary that ties together the overlapping themes of the previous three chapters, as well as offer concrete recommendations for parents and educators. This work offers a unique perspective on bullying behavior. By applying a sociological and feminist lens to bullying, findings from this study may better inform advocates who are trying to remedy bullying in their schools and communities.

CHAPTER II

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HOW GIRLS AND BOYS INTERPRET THEIR EXPERIENCES OF BEING BULLIED

Abstract

While much research has examined how bullying differs for girls and boys, very little has examined the quantitative *and* qualitative differences of how girls and boys interpret their experiences. By utilizing open-ended questions from a national survey on school-aged children and bullying, this study aims to fill that gap by offering a qualitative content analysis. Specifically, this study aims to answer two research questions: Based on sex, are the experiences of bullying different for girls and boys and does gender influence the types of bullying girls and boys experience? To help answer this question, Patricia Yancey Martin and Judith Lorber's theory of understanding gender as a social institution is applied. Key findings of this study suggest that bullying based on sexuality and gender presentation serve to reinforce boys' status over girls. Also, children who downplay the severity of their experiences are indirectly reinforcing the gender binary. Findings from this study offer insight into how childhood bullying may influence later interactions that perpetuate gender inequalities. Suggestions for how to improve anti-bullying campaigns, such as sex specific anti-bullying programs, conclude this paper.

Introduction

Getting picked on, teased, and even pushed around by peers is often seen as a "normal" component of childhood and adolescence. However, bullying has been recognized by psychologists and educators as a form of abuse, as it often entails physical and/or psychological harm to individuals. As a result of being bullied, victims often exhibit characteristics such as shyness, anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Sullivan 2011). Children targeted for their gender expression or sexuality have lower grade point averages, low self-esteem, and experience higher levels of depression compared to students who are not bullied (Meyer 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, and Palmer 2011). Despite the numerous attempts to understand, prevent, and cope with bullying, childhood bullying remains widespread in American schools. In-depth examination of how girls and boys experience bullying differently can inform current and future anti-bullying efforts to better understand and address bullying in schools.

Literature Review

To better understand bullying behavior, we must first consider the prevalence and gender differences Previous studies have uncovered important components in bullying behavior. Below is a concise overview of contributions from previous researchers, pertaining specifically to the definition and frequency of bullying, as well as sex and gender differences. Following is an overview of Lorber and Martin's theory, recognizing gender as a social institution.

Definition and Prevalence of Bullying

Bullying is commonly defined as continual behavior that is intended to inflict harm on a person and often involves an imbalance of power (Olweus 1993; Meyer 2009; Sullivan 2011). Within schools, "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus 1993:9; 1986). Bullying is often synonymous with the terms peer victimization, peer aggression, peer mistreatment, and peer harassment (Dellasega and Nixon 2003; Fried and Fried 1996; Graham and Juvonen 2001; Meyer 2009; Olweus 2001). For the purpose of this paper, the term 'bullying' will be used to describe behavior that aligns with Olweus's (1993; 2001) definition of bullying.

Compared to other forms of violence in American schools, bullying is the primary form of aggression (Sanders and Phye 2004; Sullivan 2011). Researchers have tried to measure the rates and prevalence of bullying within schools. However, depending on the characteristics of the sample and the definition of bullying used (Finkelhor et al. 2011; Hamburger et al. 2011), studies report varying numbers. For instance, one study estimated that within schools, 52% of children have been bullied (Gruber and Fineran 2008), while another study estimated that the rates are between 40% to 80% (Juvonen and Graham 2001).

An important sampling characteristic that influences rates of bullying is age. According to researchers at National Center for Education Statistics, in 2011, 28% of 12-18 year olds reported being bullied in school (Robers, Kemp, Truman, Snyder 2013). Sixth graders reported the highest rates of being bullied, at 37%, compared to 30% of 7th graders, 31% of 8th graders (Robers et al. 2013). High school students reported the lowest

rate of experiencing bullying, with 22% (Robers et al. 2013). Regardless of the specific numbers, it is clear that bullying is a widespread problem in schools across the U.S. However, the risk of victimization is not uniform, particularly between girls and boys.

Sex and gender differences in bullying. The prevalence of bullying within schools is widespread and some studies suggest that students who are marginalized based on specific traits (such as appearance, sex, race, sexuality, or physical/mental ability) are often especially vulnerable to becoming targets for bullying. This study focuses primarily on sex and gender differences. Sex is based on one's biological characteristics, while gender pertains to the social and cultural construction of the appropriate roles and norms for each sex (Lorber 1994). A newborn's sex category (female or male) is dependent upon their external genitalia (Lorber 1994), whereas gender reflects the societal norms of how each sex is expected to act, dress, talk, and interact (feminine or masculine) (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994).

Much literature on bullying has explored how children's role in bullying differs by sex (for examples see Espelage, Mebane, and Swearer 2004; Olweus 1993; Osterman, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Kaaukiainen, Landau, Fraczek, and Caprara 1998). Overwhelmingly, males are perceived as being more aggressive than females (Espelage et al. 2004), and therefore are more often the targets *and* perpetrators of bullying (Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Olweus 1993). Boys are also more likely to use direct (physical) bullying (Fried and Fried 1996; Olweus 1993), which includes hitting, kicking, choking, spitting, or hair pulling (Sullivan 2011). Indirect bullying, including relational aggression and non-verbal psychological bullying, is used primarily by girls (Espelage et al. 2004;

Fried and Fried 1994; Osterman et al. 1998; Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Sullivan 2011). Indirect forms of bullying include deliberately excluding, ignoring, or isolating someone (Espelage et al. 2004; Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Sullivan 2011).

In addition to girls and boys using different types of bullying, their gender influences why they are targeted. Gender is a social construct and as such, is not devised in equal ways for women and men (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). Masculine traits are overwhelmingly favored over feminine traits, therefore boys who do not adequately embody masculine traits are often judged more harshly than girls who might not entirely "do" femininity (see West and Zimmerman 1987). Understanding the gender rules that children learn offers a better understanding of how bullying differs for girls and boys. For instance, girls have been socialized to value relationships and avoid social isolation (Simmons 2002). Girls use communication to establish and maintain relationships, which can also be used as a tool to harass, isolate, or exclude (Simmons 2002; Tannen 1990). Relational aggression is therefore more common amongst girls (Meyer 2009; Simmons 2002). On the other hand, masculine traits require boys to be physically strong, dominant, and assertive. Rules of "doing" gender are clear, however it is not uncommon for people to overlap or confuse rules associated with sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Often times, assumptions about one's sexual orientation may be based on their gender expression. For instance, if one's gender presentation does not align with their sex, their sexual orientation is questioned. Boys are more harshly judged for breaking traditional gender rules, compared to girls. As a result, boys often engage in more physical bullying (Meyer 2009) as a means of asserting a heterosexual identity.

Given the negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians in society, it is not surprising to find that children who do not successfully present their gender in alliance with their sex often experience bullying from peers. Children who do not conform to traditional notions of gender expression are often labeled as a "sissy," "tomboy," "dyke," or "fag" (Lorber 1994; Meyer 2009; Pascoe 2007). In their National School Climate Survey of 2011, the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported that over half of the students in their survey heard negative remarks regarding sexual orientation and gender expression from fellow students, teachers, and staff. These included comments such as "faggot" or "dyke" and not acting "feminine" or "masculine" enough (Kosciw et al. 2011). Of their sample, 27.1% of children were physically harassed because of their gender expression, and of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students, 38.3% were harassed because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al. 2011). Regardless of a child's sex, the most frequent forms of harassment experienced by LGBT youth are anti-gay language, slurs, and jokes (Meyer 2009). There have been more extreme cases documented, in which victims are physically assaulted, raped, and in rare cases, killed (Sullivan 2011). Girls and boys who do not "do" their gender in socially prescribed ways are often targets of bullying, as are children who are gay or perceived to be gay (Meyer 2009; Sullivan 2011; West and Zimmerman 1987). Examining the types and reasons why some children are targeted may offer more insight into how these behaviors are shaped by sex and gender expectations. This will require researchers to consider how larger social institutions, namely gender, shapes girls and boys bullying behavior.

Gender as a Social Institution

A great deal of literature on bullying is not situated within a specific theory. A major contribution of this study is to utilize a feminist theory to examine bullying behavior amongst middle school students. Feminists believe in political, social, and economic equality for women and men (Collins 1991; Harding 1991; hooks 1981). Broadly defined, feminist theories seek to examine the causes and possible solutions to sex and gender inequalities. Various feminist theories have focused on multiculturalism (see Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Mohanty 1988), criminology (Chesney-Lind 2006; Miller and Mullins 2009;), intersectionality and Black feminist thought (Collins 1991; hooks 1981), masculinities (Cornell 2005; Pascoe 2005; 2013), and social constructionalism (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). To better understand how girls and boys describe their experiences of being victimized in schools, the theoretical framework used for this paper is understanding gender as a social institution (Lorber 1994; Martin 2004).

Every society categorizes people based on sex and assigns specific expectations that are part of the social construction of gender. Within American society, masculinity and femininity are distinct categories that are constructed as polar opposites (Bem 1994; Lorber 1994). Sandra Bem (1994) describes this distinction or dichotomy as the gender binary. Therefore, behavior, rules, and expectations are shaped by the gender binary, which asserts that women must be feminine and men must be masculine. Such ideology enables justification that various rules and traits are "only" deemed appropriate for either women or men (Bem 1994). These disparities are reflected in gender ranking, in which one gender is favored over the other (Lorber 1994). Within American society, ranking

masculine traits as superior to feminine traits is reinforced through interpersonal relationships and language, as well as social institutions (Johnson 2005; Lorber 1994).

Instead of viewing gender as rules individuals perform, some feminists conceptualize gender as a social institution. Broadly defined, social institutions are social in nature, exist over time and place, consist of social practices that reoccur or repeat, influence behavior and choices, and exhibit conflict and power dynamics (Martin 2004). While social institutions are often seen as impenetrable, they are also susceptible to change since, as embodied agents, group members are able to continually affirm or challenge its existence (Martin 2004). Influenced by Giddens (1984), Patricia Yancey Martin (2004) offers a thorough explanation as to why gender is best understood as a social instutition.

Gender satisfies the tenants that define social institutions, since "Everyday gendered interactions build gender into the family, the work process, and other organizations and institutions, which in turn reinforce gender expectations for individuals" (Lorber 1994:32; see also Johnson 2005; Martin 2004). Gender can be understood as a social institution, because many people organize their lives around gender and this process greatly affects individual lives and social interaction (Lorber 1994; Martin 2004; see also 'gender order' in Connell 1987). Judith Lorber (1994:1) asserts that "gender as an institution… establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organization of society… and is also an entity in and of itself." By recognizing that gender is a social institution, gender inequality is understood as the "endurance" of social institutions that favor patriarchal values (Martin 2004:250; see also Acker 1990; Johnson

1997). Within the social institution of gender, there is a reciporcal relationship between gender differences that are continually reinforced and challenged. By recognizing that gender endures over time, is organized by power dimensions, and is reliant on embodied agents, we see gender as a social insitutions and can begin to question "*the origins and perpetuation of gender*" (Martin 2004:1261 emphasis in original).

In the current study, the school is argued to be a social institution that reinforces the gender binary and gender ranking. For instance, although teaching is overwhelming considered "women's work," schools embrace a "masculine ethic" (Kanter 1993). A masculine ethic is a set of characteristics what favor analytic skills, practical approaches driven by reason and not emotion, and task-orientated methods to problem solve (Acker 1990; Kanter 1993). Within schools, a masculine ethic is evident in various sports receiving more funding and value; boys' sports, such as football and basketball, are valued over feminine sports, such as cheerleading and field hockey. Furthermore, boys' sports are rarely at risk of their funds being cut, whereas ensuring funding for girls sports is a common struggle (Priest 1994).

Schools are a gendered institution, because their policies, practices, interactions, and ideology are distinctly patterned as either masculine or feminine; schools are not gender-neutral (Kanter 1975; 1993; Thorne 1997). As a result, gender inequalities are reproduced since there is a clear hierarchy, or ranking, of these gendered patterns (Acker 1990; Kanter 1993). Much of bullying behavior occurs in schools and is therefore shaped by these gendered patterns. The current study aims to understand how student's behavior is shaped by sex differences and as a result, how their behavior might reproduce or challenge gender inequalities. My research questions are; 1.) Based on sex, are the

experiences of bullying different for girls and boys? and 2.) Does gender influence the types of bullying girls and boys experience?

Data and Methods

Data for this study come from the Youth Voice Project. Conducted by Charisse Nixon and Stan Davis (2014), the Youth Voice Project is the first large scale national research study that aims to understand how bullying is experienced by youth. The overarching goals of the Youth Voice Project were to understand student perceptions of peer victimization, responsiveness of school staff, and connectedness to their school (Davis and Nixon 2014). Students in 31 schools (28 public schools and 3 private schools) in 12 states throughout the U.S. completed the on-line survey via SurveyMonkey (N=13,177), which consisted of 45 questions (33 multiple-choice questions and 12 open-ended questions). All questions were answered on the computer, including responses to the open-ended questions. This took students approximately 45 minutes to complete. Participants ranged in ages from 11 to 19 years old, with 10% in elementary school (5^{th} grade), 57 % in middle school (6^{th}-8^{th} grade), and 33% in high school students (9^{th}-12^{th} grade) (for a complete description of the survey, see Davis and Nixon 2014).

Sampling Criteria and Characteristics

Middle school students report higher rates of bullying and fear of peer victimization when compared to elementary and high school students (Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler 1992; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002). Therefore, I limited my sample

and focused exclusively on middle school children. My sample also consisted of respondents who satisfied Olweus (1993) definition of bullying, which states that bullied children are those who experience unwanted physical or emotional mistreatment two or more times a month. Students who answered "every day," "once a week," or "two or three times a month" to the following questions were included in my sample:

> Q29. In the past month, how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you?
>
> Q30. In the past month, how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?

In addition to being in middle school and fitting Olweus' definition of bullying, my sample also consisted of respondents who gave a typed response for the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis used for this study is the text from the open-ended responses to the following question:

> Q52. If you feel comfortable, please describe what happened to you [when you were mistreated by a peer]. Because this is a confidential survey, please also tell an adult you trust at school about what happened if you have not already done that. Please do not include any names.

Close-ended questions leading up this question asked respondents to mark what their bully focused on (i.e. their race, looks, gender, etc.) and who the culprit was (i.e. male student, female student, or teachers) (see Appendix B). Respondent's verbatim text is included in the findings. In an effort to capture the direct accounts offered by respondents, I did not alter the original responses by making grammatical or spelling corrections. Given the frequency of punctuation, spelling, and grammar errors, "[*sic*]" was not used.

Students who were not in middle school, did not fit Olweus's definition of bullying, and did not offer a response for the open-ended question were excluded from

my sample. Once the above criteria were met, my sample consisted of 362 girls and 239 boys. Of the sample, most girls (136) and boys (98) were 12 years old and in 6th grade (130 girls and 99 boys) (see Table 2.1). In terms of racial breakdown, there were 102 non-white girls and 204 white girls. There were 71 non-white boys and 124 white boys (see Table 2.1 for complete racial breakdown).

Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics of Middle School Girls and Boys (Percentages in Parentheses are for All Counts)

	Girls (n=362)	Boys (n=239)
Age		
11 or younger	89 (25%)	58 (24%)
12	136 (38%)	98 (41%)
13	108 (30%)	61 (26%)
14	27 (8%)	19 (8%)
15	0	2 (.8%)
16	0	1 (.4%)
Missing	2 (1%)	0
Grade		
6th Grade	130 (36%)	99 (41%)
7th Grade	128 (35%)	82 (34%)
8th Grade	104 (29%)	58 (24%)
Racial Breakdown		
Native American	11 (3%)	9 (4%)
African-American	21 (6%)	11 (5%)
Hispanic-American	29 (8%)	16 (7%)
Pacific Islander	1 (.3%)	2 (1%)
White	204 (56%)	124 (52%)
Asian-American	11 (3%)	12 (5%)
Multi-racial	29 (8%)	21(9%)
Other	30 (8%)	19 (8%)
Prefer not to answer	20 (6%)	20 (8%)
Missing	6 (2%)	5(2%)
TOTAL	362 (100%)	239 (100%)

Analytic Strategy

The purpose of this study was to examine if, based on sex, girls and boys are bullied for different reasons and how the reasons and responses to bullying was influenced by gender. To uncover this, I used text from middle school students who

answered an open-ended question, which prompted them to reflect on their encounters with bullying. A qualitative content analysis is the best research approach in light of my research questions, because it enabled me to examine patterns that emerged from the data and go beyond calculating the counts of pre-specified codes in order to look for latent meaning within the text of the student comments (see Graneheim and Lundman 2004; Krippendorff 2013; Morgan 1993).

Qualitative content analysis entails a close and thorough reading of the texts, identifying themes or patterns and coding them, then interpreting and translating their meanings. The textual data of the open-ended question I used was verbatim text, however the text was not particularly rich (responses ranged from one-word answers to a few short sentences). Therefore, in searching for themes, I looked for repetition, similarities, and differences between respondents' comments (see Ryan and Bernard 2003). Answering my research questions required me to compare the frequencies of key words (codes) and interpret the meanings of these frequencies.

More specifically, I utilized a summative approach for my study. This required me to first identify and quantify particular words and content (Hsieh and Shannon 2000) and then decipher the meanings of the themes that emerged. This phase is called latent content analysis, which allowed me to interpret the data by considering the underlying significance of various words and meaning (Hsieh and Shannon 2000; Krippendorff 2013). In light of my research questions, utilizing qualitative content analysis is especially beneficial since it "facilitates making comparisons because the counts it produces form explicit answers to questions about what differences are present in the data (pattern detection) as well as further explanations about why these differences occur

(interpretation)" (Morgan 1993:120). Findings of this study include numerical counts of key words (codes) and themes, as well as an analysis of what the counts imply regarding gendered differences of bullying behavior.

Findings

Results were obtained by counting and analyzing the frequency of themes and key words (as informed by the literature on bullying). The counts and percentages of each theme for girls and boys are presented in Table 2.2 and the key word counts for each theme are presented in Tables 2.3 and 2.4. The text (responses to the open-ended question) was first sorted into three content areas[1] (see Graneheim and Lundman 2003). The first content area is "reasons for being bullied" and includes the following two themes; appearance and sexual behavior/sexuality. The second content area is "types of victimization" and includes two themes; physical bullying and relational aggression (which has four sub-themes). "Down play of severity" composed the third content area, which did not have separate themes.

Counting the themes enabled me to locate the patterns in the data (see Table 2.2). The key words, or codes, were identified and their frequencies were recorded; this constitutes the manifest content (Graneheim and Lundman 2003; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) (see Tables 2.3 and 2.4). Next, the interpreted underlying meaning of the themes and codes, the latent content, was examined (Graneheim and Lundman 2003; Hsieh and

[1] Many statements are not mutually exclusive to a theme, as illustrated in the following statement, "they would say ur ugly and shove me." This statement addresses being a target of bullying based on the student's physical appearance and reflects the type of peer mistreatment she experienced. When completing the initial counts of themes, this statement (and similar statements) was included under the themes "appearance" and "physical aggression."

Shannon 2005). Brief descriptions of the manifest and latent content for each theme and sub-theme are below.

Table 2.2: Counts for Themes and Percentages Girls and Boys

	Girls (n=362)	Boys (n=239)
Reasons for Being Bullied		
Appearance	46 (12.7%)	19 (8%)
Sexual behavior/sexuality	35 (9.7%)	16 (6.7%)
Types of Victimization		
Physical bullying	73 (20.2%)	69 (28.9%)
Relational aggression	170 (47%)	75 (31.4%)
Rumors	45 (12.4%)	6 (2.5%)
Teasing	78 (21.5%)	41 (17.5%)
Threats	28 (7.7%)	19 (8%)
Exclusion	19 (5.2%)	9 (3.8%)
Downplay Severity	25 (6.9%)	30 (12.6%)

Table 2.3: Key Word Counts for Reasons for Being Bullied

	Girls	Boys
Appearance		
"Ugly"	11	2
"Fat"	18	10
"Height"	1	2
"Short"	4	3
Subtotal for Appearance	34	17
Sexual Behavior/Sexuality		
"Gay"	0	7
"Lesbian"	5	0
"Bisexual"	1	0
"Slut"	4	0
"Pregnant"	3	0
"Boyfriend"	7	0
"Girlfriend"	1	2
Subtotal for Behavior/Sexuality	21	9

Table 2.4: Key Word Counts for Types of Victimization

	Girls	Boys
Physical Bullying		
"Hit"	32	25
"Punch"	7	27
"Smack"	0	4
"Choke"	2	6
"Push"	38	22
"Trip"	5	4
"Slap"	10	2
Subtotal for Physical Bullying	94	90
Relational Aggression		
"Tease"	7	5
"name" or "called names"	81	68
"exclude" or "left out"	11	4
"rumor"	42	5
"threat"	23	11
Subtotal for Relational Aggression	164	93

Reasons for Being Targeted

Within this sample, children reported being targeted for various reasons. Most common were accounts that related to their appearance and/or gender presentation or alleged sexual orientation. Many of these accounts align with previous literature, although the specific counts for girls and boys are noteworthy for a few key themes. Although the counts were not mutually exclusive, percentages were included (see Table 2).

Appearance. Aligning with the literature, girls (12.7%) in this sample reported being teased and harassed based on their appearance more often than boys (8%). A closer examination of this theme shows that girls and boys were teased about their height, their size, or general comments such as being called "ugly". A white girl in 8th grade explained, "i was made fun of because i am not as skinny as the other girls. i was also

made fun of because my upper chest sticks out with different shirts." Another white girl in 8th grade wrote, "I was called 'guppy' because they said I have big eyes like a guppy fish:("

Boys reported similar accounts, as illustrated by a 7th grade Native American boy who wrote, "They just said I was short and ugly" and an 8th grade Hispanic boy reported, "They just say bad things about me like you fatass or other things." Girls and boys who were targeted based on their appearance offered short explanations of the names they were called by their peers. Resonating with literature on gender and appearance, girls were often targeted because of their weight and appearance, whereas boys were targeted because they were too small (for examples see Johnson 2005 and Lorber 1994).

Sexual behavior and sexuality. Both girls (9.7%) and boys (6.7%) were teased based on their real or alleged sexual behavior and their real or perceived sexual orientation. However, girls were primarily teased based on their sexual behavior and boys were teased based on gender presentation and sexual orientation.

Some girls were teased and called a "lesbian" or "bisexual", as conveyed in the following statement made by a white girl in 6th grade, "i was going to my locker and and i past bye a girl geting changed and i was looking in to see if it was my locker spot and she saw me looking and called me a lesbian witch i am not and do not feel comfortable to be called such a name." Noteworthy here is the student's attempt to fully explain and defend herself, attempting to eliminate any suspicion of being a lesbian.

Other girls were teased based on their relationships with boys or their alleged sexual behavior, as explained by a Native American girl in 7th grade, "Making fun of me

because i don't have a boyfriend and not good looking." This statement overlaps with appearance as a reason for being targeted as well. Another girl, white and in 8th grade, wrote, "People are spreading rumors about me being pregnant." In addition to sexual behavior comments, some girls reported being sexually harassed, as a Hispanic girl in 8th grade wrote, "I was sexually harrased by boys and i see girls getting sexually harrased too" and by a white girl in 6th grade, "i have been touched by so guys witch make me feel unconfterble becuase they have no right to come along and touch my body." These accounts illustrate that the girls able to identify incidences of sexual harassment, as well as voice their disapproval of boys' behavior and concern for other girls who were affected by the harassment.

Boys were teased based on sexual orientation and sexual behavior, but there were no reports of being sexually harassed. Common statements are reflected in this Hispanic boy in 8th grade who stated, "A boy told me that I cry like a girl and punched me on the arm" and by a white boy in 8th grade, "People make fun of my voice because it squeaks and the think I am homosexual." A white boy in 7th grade offered his feelings in response to being teased, "I am called gay all the time and it hurts my feelings. It has happened to me from 4th grade until know and i was hoping it would go away when I came here but it just kept going on and on. :(" This statement is similar to answers by girls who had been sexually harassed; the student attempted to explain the incident and offer how he felt as a result of being teased. In regards to sexual behavior, one boy was called immature because he didn't have a girlfriend, whereas another boy was teased because he hugged a girl. Teasing based on relationship status is not uncommon for grade school boys and often places boys in a double bind (see Pascoe 2005). Boys' heterosexuality is confirmed

if they are in a relationship with a girl, however their independence is compromised if they devote time to their girlfriend.

Types of Victimization

The second theme, types of victimization, pertains to whether children experienced physical or relational aggression from their peers. In the following, personal accounts reflect the sex differences in how girls and boys were victimized.

Physical bullying. It has been documented that boys partake in more physical aggression than girls (Fried and Fried 1996; Olweus 1993), although growing cases suggest that girls have a higher likelihood to be involved with various forms of bullying (Robers et al. 2013). Within this sample, boys (28.9%) reported a slightly higher count of experiencing physical bullying compared to girls (20.2%). Girls were hit, pushed, tripped, and slapped more than boys (see Table 6). In comparison to girls, boys reported more incidences of being punched, smacked, and choked by their peers. While the code counts were not greatly different, it is noteworthy to examine the degree of severity for some attacks (punching compared to tripping and slapping compared to being choked).

A white girl in 6th grade explained, "I said someting and my friend took ot the wrong way a nd kicked me and sometimes she bites me fun fun I try to tell her no but she doesn't always listens to me. In the hallways sometimes she hites me." One girl in 3rd grade answered, "last year during gym every day I was grabbed shaken, pushed into a corner. Even though there was an adult around, it didn't help. I dreaded goind to gym because this happened every day in the lockeroom." These accounts illustrate the girls

attempts to fully explain what was happening to them, as well as including how the repeated mistreatment made them feel. While only a few girls specified the location of the incident (such as the above quote taking place in gym and the locker-room), more boys mentioned gym or an organized sport as the location of their mistreatment. This reflects the emphasis of sports being a key component in boys asserting their heterosexuality and successfully displaying their masculinity (for examples, see Johnson 2005 and Messner 1992).

In addition to more boys specifying "gym" as the location of where they were being mistreated, only boys reported cases of physical attacks being targeted at their genitalia. One white boy in 8th grade wrote, "i got kick in the private parts and a tennis ball was thrown at me intensionally by [a boy]." A white boy in 6th grade answered, "Sometimes I get hurt in places where you are not supposed to get hurt at." The occurrence of boys' accounts taking place in gym class and attacks focused at their private areas offers further insight into the gendered differences of how girls and boys experience bullying. Girls reported experiencing sexual harassment if they were looked at or touched inappropriately. However, boys who are touched or hit in the privates by other boys did not cite such incidences as "sexual harassment". Given that sports offer boys a salient way to prove their masculinity, it is not entirely surprising that boys who might not have "measured up" were targeted by their peers.

Relational aggression. Girls (47%) were more likely to experience relational aggression than boys (31.4%). Sub-themes within relational aggression include girls and

boys reporting that rumors were spread about them, and that they were teased, threatened, or excluded by their peers.

A 6th grade girl wrote, "a frie3nd i blaming me and telling roumers about me and is making me sad and it like ther turning everybody aganist me." A white girl in 7th grade explained, "my nickname is waddles and everybody calls me that and a rumor went around that im nothing and poor." Rumors were often spread about a girl's sexual behavior and interpersonal skills (i.e. "being mean") and girls sharing these stories often attempted to offer more information around why the rumors where spread and how they felt as a response to the rumors being spread.

Many boys responded that fellow students "called them names" or "make fun of them," but other students offered more in-depth accounts of the relational aggression they experienced. One white boy in 6th grade explained "Kids made nasty comments to me about reasons of gender. They wanted to fight and called me mean names." This boy was threatened and teased based on his gender presentation. Another white boy in 6th grade shared a story of how one mistake spiraled into regular teasing, "last week I accidently misspelled my name on a paper and when I put it in my folder people noticed and now they torment me and take letters out of my name to make it sound funny." Accounts that related to threats often revolved around physical aggression, as one white boy in 7th grade answered, "people usualy call me names, swear at me and threaten to beat me up." These responses align with previous studies and illustrate that relational aggression is often more subtle and frequent than physical bullying (Espelage et al. 2004; Osterman et al. 1998; Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Sullivan 2011).

Downplay Severity

Both girls (6.9%) and boys (12.6%) shared accounts in which they minimized the hurt they felt, defended the culprits, shrugged off the incidence as being merely a joke, or denied that they had hurt feelings from the incident. For instance, the word "just" was used by many students, suggesting that while the student recognizes a wrongdoing occurred, it was not severe or especially worthy of attention. One white girl explained, "Some kids just started making fun of my name but it really didn't bother me. I know they were just joking, but it sort of got on my nerves." Here, the girl's words "just" and "sort of" serve to negate any hurt she might have felt, however she contradicts herself by stating that the "joking" did indeed hurt her feelings. Similarly, a Native American girl denies that being called names hurt her feelings at all; "Some people call me names. Not in a really serious way though. They call me b-i-t-c-h. not meaning to hurt me." While downplaying the seriousness of being called a "bitch," this girl also infers that she believes that the culprits did not intend to hurt her.

There were more accounts of boys downplaying the severity of an incident than girls. As one white boy explained, "Sometimes people just joke around with me." Another Asian American boy referred to the common phrase, "boys will be boys," and explained, "They just call everyone names because, well you know we are all boys." Another boy takes it upon himself to speak for fellow boys, "It was fine. We do it all the time. All it is are practical jokes. No one is really hurt." Here the boy takes the focus off of himself and instead speaks for other boys. And as explained by another boy, "I just get called fat ass, and such but it *generally* doesn't hurt me" (emphasis added). Mirroring this boy's dismissal that being called names doesn't overwhelming bother him, another boy

explained, “I don’t really care if I’m called names or punched or kicked, or harassed. I live with it.” A more thorough analysis of these accounts is warranted, since students who minimize or dismiss the possible severity of repeated incidences of bullying may be serving to normalize or excuse the behavior.

Discussion

This study provides insight into the gendered differences of bullying for middle school students. While many of the code counts align with previous studies on bullying, a closer examination of these counts sheds light on the subtle differences between how girls and boys experience being targeted by their peers and interpret their experiences. Noteworthy findings revolve around two key topics of inquiry: gender and sexual harassment and normalized behavior. Examining these themes by utilizing a feminist theory and understanding gender as a social institution will enable a richer understanding of how bullying serves to reinforce the gender binary and gender ranking amongst middle school students.

Gender Harassment and Sexual Harassment

The findings of this study show that girls are primarily sexually harassed, whereas boys were more often victims of gender harassment. Though on the same continuum, Lorder (1994: 250) differentiates between gender harassment and sexual harassment. One is experiencing gender harassment if inappropriate name calling takes place and their

gender is used to infer the "individual's capabilities or career comment." Sexual harassment takes place if,

> …the behavior is *inappropriate* for the situation; what should be a gender-neutral situation is turned into an *unwanted* sexual situation, and the initiator or instigator has *power*, which makes it difficult for those subject to the harassment to protest, leave, complain to others, or take action without jeopardy to their own status (Lorber 1994: 250; see also Meyer 2009).

Power is an integral part of gender and sexual harassment, which serves to reinforce boys' status, or ranking, over girls. Gender and its differences are solidified through everyday social processes (Lorber 1994). As an institution, gender dictates how girls and boys should interact and behave at school. The results of this study illustrate that gender ranking is maintained through three key means; boys using girls to increase their social standing, boys targeting other boys who do not display traditional masculine traits, and girls participating in girl-to-girl bulling. Both girls and boys enact gendered patterns of behavior, which are influenced by the larger gender institution.

To adequately satisfy their gender appropriate behavior, boys inevitably reinforce heteronormativity and characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity. Heteronormativity is the notion that heterosexuality is the norm in society (Lorber 1994). This resonates with hegemonic masculinity, which asserts, "one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted" (Connell 2005:77; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Pascoe 2007). Characteristics of hegemonic masculinity require men to be strong, hyper-heterosexual, and in control (Connell 2005:77; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). These characteristics promote men's dominance while simultaneously ensuring that women remain subordinate (Connell 2005).

To assert their heterosexuality and therefore their "badge of success" (Johnson 2005: 61), boys view and use girls as objects and partake in sexist jokes. The sexual harassment experienced by girls is therefore the direct result of boys asserting themselves in a social hierarchy (Lorber 1995; Pascoe 2007) and striving to achieve hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel and Mahler 2003). For instance, girls mentioned how boys made inappropriate comments or touched their bodies without permission and explicitly responded that they were "sexually harassed" by boys. This suggests that boys feel that they have freedom to touch girl's bodies, even when they are told "no". Through these actions, boys learn how to assert their dominance, while girls learn that their bodies are often the object of scorn and unwarranted attention from boys. This type of behavior may then carried through into adulthood where some men feel that it is okay to look, touch, and objectify women. Meanwhile, women may feel like they need to ignore these incidences and not take them as serious threats.

Traits of hegemonic masculinity also affirm that anything "feminine" is devalued and avoided. By reprimanding boys who do not adequately embody masculine and heterosexual behavior, boys aspiring to hegemonic masculinity are asserting their heterosexuality, control, and power. In comparison to girls, boys are more likely to find themselves victims of gender harassment since girls have more flexibility in breaking away from traditional gender norms without their sexual orientation being challenged (Lorber 1995). If boys do not exhibit heteronormative behavior and appropriate gender presentation, they are often teased with homophobic slurs (Johnson 2005), most notably "fag" (Pascoe 2005; 2007) or "that's so gay" (Kimmel and Mahler 2003:1453). Calling other boys "fag" is a "powerful disciplinary mechanism", as it serves to control other

boys' behavior (Pascoe 2007: 54; 2013). Pascoe (2007: 54) further explains that being called fag, "… has as much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness of femininity as it does with a sexual identity." Therefore, homophobia and masculinity influence gender harassment in ways that are unique for boys. Findings from the current study support this, since boys were more likely to be called "gay" than girls.

Whereas gender harassment is unique to boys, girl-to-girl bulling (or "horizontal hostility" or "gender policing") dominates girls' bullying behavior. Girl-to-girl bullying perpetuates gender ranking, because instead of girls challenging or resisting their objectification and harassment perpetrated by boys, many girls resort to victimizing other girls. With the exception of being sexually harassed, several girls reported that other girls, *not boys*, were the culprits of their mistreatment. Girls' social status is secondary to boys, but girls are able to assert their status in relation to other girls by ostracizing or befriending their peers (Armstrong, Hailton, Armstrong, and Seeley 2014; Simmons 2002). These actions indicate that girls are inadvertently reinforcing boys control over them (see Johnson 2005) since they do not overtly challenge or attack boys. Instead, girls indirectly accept their secondary status and work within their means and social groups to gain status by victimizing their female peers.

The current study found that girls and boys solidify the notion that gender is a social institution by examining their bullying behavior. Boys used girls to establish their masculinity, berate other boys who did not adequately embody masculine traits, and girls targeted other girls to assert their social status. This is important because it illustrates that within these interactions, power is an undeniable component that reinforces boys' status

over girls. Also, these gender differences persist because children (embodied agents) continuously shape and affirm these differences (see Martin 2004). As explained by Martin (2004: 1263), "Like all institutions, gender is a product of people who occupy different positions and have conflicting identities and interests." Therefore, children who are involved in bullying can either solidify or challenge gender differences that are perceived to be inherent in the social institution of gender. This finding contributes to existing literature by offering a more in-depth analysis of the interplay between how girls' and boys' bullying behavior is shaped by gender differences.

Normalized Gendered Behavior

Both girls and boys reported "shrugging off" or downplaying the severity of their experience(s). Denial is an acceptable response to bullying within American culture, as it is often voiced that "kids will be kids" and bullying is a "natural" experience for school aged children. Denial for children is a defense mechanism, which may enable victims to compartmentalize any hardship they experienced. However the technique can also have dire consequences in the long run. Johnson (2005:158) explains, "The denial that saves a girl from confronting the reality of her abuse, for example, can eventually cripple her ability to function as an adult and drive her into therapy as a way to free herself from it and what lies behind it." Examining why girls downplay their experiences offers insight into why relational aggression is widespread.

Within this sample, not only did many girls report that the assailant of their mistreatment were other girls, but that she was a "friend," "best friend," or "ex-best friend." The insidious nature of relational aggression amongst girls is reinforced through

their friendships. This suggests that girls are their own worst enemies and meanness is a common trait of their friendships. Simmons (2002:39) refers to this relationship as "intimate enemies" and found that of her sample, girls greatly feared social isolation. Therefore, many girls choose to stay in unhealthy relationships rather than have no relationship at all (Besag 2006; Simmons 2002). Mistreatment is an integral part of girls' friendships since "…the relationship itself is often the weapon with which girls' battles are fought" (Simmons 2002:31). Girls who downplay the severity of their mistreatment may have accepted that such behavior is a routine trait of friendship and deny that the behavior is cause for alarm. As previously noted, victims of bullying can have internalizing problems such as low self-esteem or depression. Denial then acts more as a temporary band-aid then a healthy means of coping with bullying. Girls may therefore be learning early on that relational aggression is an expected and accepted trait of relationships.

Boys, on the other hand, overwhelmingly denied a problem existed. This was evident in some of the students offering responses "no" and "nothing" to the open-ended question, and is especially apparent in the lack of responses given by boys in general. Also prominent with boys was acknowledging that a wrongdoing occurred and reasoning that the event was not something to be particularly concerned about. Boys who were victimized by their peers and denied the occurrence or accounted that the situation was not worrisome are indirectly reinforcing ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Accepting their status as a victim challenges traits of hegemonic masculinity, since the boys would be admitting defeat. Therefore, by shrugging off their experiences as just something that "boys do," the victims were able to save face and once again affirm their masculinity.

This in turn, further reinforces the notion that bullying amongst boys is not a grave concern and instead a natural part of their adolescence.

The overarching problem with denying that bullying has occurred and that its effects are not severe and worthy of attention serves to maintain the status quo within schools. By ignoring or downplaying the severity of bullying, schools continue to function as institutions that indirectly reinforce the gender binary and gender ranking. Girls, who stay in friendships that are abusive, learn early on that such behavior is a natural component of their lives. Similarly, boys who deny any bullying occurred or downplay the hurt they felt, perpetuate notions that support hegemonic masculinity and banish boys from sharing, coping, and dealing with their emotions in adaptive ways. Schools enable these patterns to continue when such behaviors are overlooked or unchallenged. Teachers can easily detect and stop aggressive behavior between boys, since hitting, shoving, and punching are visible forms of bullying (Simmons 2002). However, girls who throw rude glances at one another, pass hurtful notes, or ignore one another are not as easily detectable behaviors and therefore often go overlooked by teachers (Simmons 2002). Teachers may unknowingly be reinforcing the normalcy of gendered bullying behavior by limiting their attention to only visible and obvious forms of bullying.

The children who are most disadvantaged in these situations are also those with the least amount of power to actually do something about the inequality (see Johnson 2005). Therefore, those in powerful positions within the school system, namely teachers and administrators, need to draw attention and give voice to the powerless and interrupt gender inequalities. They may also consider the importance of role modeling and

promoting the acceptance of gender diversity. This may be accomplished by teachers receiving formal training on topics pertaining to gender and sexuality diversity and sexual and gender harassment within schools. Such lessons can then be transferred to students, thereby promoting diversity and observing more closely the gendered behaviors of girls and boys.

Limitations

Although this study provides valuable implications for educators, it is not without shortcomings. As a secondary data source, I did not have control over the questions, survey format, or methods of recruitment and implementation. A major limitation of using open-ended questions from secondary data is the inability to ask follow-up questions and probe for more thorough answers. Students' familiarity with computers may have contributed to the thoroughness of their typed responses. However, given the magnitude of schools and children who participated in the Youth Voice Project, the sample size was large for a qualitative content analysis.

Based on the written responses, it was unclear if respondents were referring to a specific incident of bullying or if they summarized their experiences. It would be interesting to know the sex of the culprit for each incidence of bullying the respondents experienced. While preceding close-ended questions asked about the sex of the bully, the written responses do not clearly indicate which event the respondent is elaborating on. Distinctions confirming the sex of the bully and victim and the types of victimization experienced could offer additional information on how girls and boys experience bullying differently.

Implications

Scholars have offered concrete suggestions for how educators can remedy bullying in their schools (Keith 2011). Many of the anti-bullying campaigns and interventions have sought to include all parties involved with bullying; teachers, staff, parents, and children (perpetrators and victims). Extending on current anti-bullying programs are two key suggestions derived from the current study. First, prevention programs must be tailored to children based on their sex. For instance, programs tailored for girls should consider clearly defining what consists of healthy relationships. Since many girls cited their friends (other girls) as the culprits of their mistreatment, anti-bullying advocates would be best served if they address this and teach young girls what characteristics they should look for in friendship (and equally, what traits they should embody as good friends). Programs tailored to boys would benefit from encouraging boys to find healthy ways to describe their feelings and events that happen in their lives. Anti-bullying programs that cater to boys should focus on cultivating boys' ability to share their emotions in written and oral communication and dissuading the impulse to react physically. Girls also should receive similar lessons since they too partook in physical forms of aggression. Such lessons would help remedy the normalcy of boys bullying, as well as foster healthier relationships later in life.

Secondly, promoting gender presentation and sexual orientation diversity is also essential in deterring future incidences of bullying. Based on previous research and findings from this study, it is abundantly clear that gender nonconformists are especially at risk of being bullied. In addition to the prevalence of such accounts, victims of homophobic bullying suffer grave psychological problems (see Meyer 2009 and Sullivan 2011). To address the prevalence of LGBT students being mistreated, GLEN established

Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools. Feedback from children who had access to a GSA in their school were significantly less likely to feel unsafe or experience verbal and/or physical bullying (Kosciw et al. 2011). Therefore, implementing a GSA in schools and involving teachers and staff in promoting a safe space and healthy relationships with LGBT students can have a great impact in diminishing bullying.

Despite some limitations, findings of this study illustrate how gender inequalities are shaped as children, specifically through bullying behavior. This study offers insight into the sex differences of how girls and boys experience bullying differently and how these differences are influenced by the gender binary and reinforce gender ranking. These findings are important because they offer anti-bullying advocates a new framework in which to understand bullying behavior. By drawing on sociological and feminist frameworks, we can conceptualize how gender as a social institution works to shape our behavior. Moving our attention away from micro-level interactions and conceptualizing how personal interactions are shaped by larger institutions (gender and schools) may better inform advocates on how pro-social behavior might be cultivated and bullying behavior be eradicated.

CHAPTER III

"WORDS SPEAK LOUDER THAN ACTIONS": THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GENDERED LANGUAGE AND BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Abstract

Gender inequalities have been examined at individual and institutional levels. One key way that gender differences are reinforced is through language. To examine gendered language differences, this study goes beyond *what* girls and boys say to examine *how* they describe their experiences, pertaining specifically to bullying. The central research question of this study is, "How do girls and boys interpret and explain their experiences of being bullied?" Using open-ended questions from a national survey, this study offers insight into how gender socialization has influenced how girls and boys describe their experiences. Findings include girls' tendency to offer in-depth responses, which reflect storytelling, while boys attempted to save face by minimizing any victimization they experienced. This study suggests that gendered patterns of language serve to reinforce gender differences. Suggestions on how adults might consider interpreting these gendered differences in describing bullying behavior conclude the paper.

Introduction

Gender differences are taught, internalized, and carried out at various levels of interaction. Children learn early on what gender roles they are expected to fulfill and receive various sanctions, should they break away from "appropriate" gender behavior. For instance, boys who display feminine characteristics are often called "sissy," whereas girls who take on masculine traits are considered "bossy" or "bitchy" (Johnson 1994). Agents of socialization reinforce the gender binary, which views masculinity and femininity as two distinct and exclusive genders (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). Obvious ways that the gender binary is reinforced is through clothing, toys, and playgroups. Less obvious, however, is how girls and boys are taught to use language differently. Not only do children learn appropriate gender roles of "doing" femininity or masculinity, there is also gender-appropriate linguistic behavior (Coates 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). As a result, patterns of communication reflect the expected behaviors associated with one's sex. There are many situations in which children interact that may demonstrate these differences in communication patterns. One way to investigate gendered communication is to examine specific types of situations that are shared by many children. A common occurrence for many school-aged children is their involvement in bullying. Children's responses to and involvement with bullying are gendered (Olweus 1993; Sullivan 2011).

The findings of this study expand upon the current understanding of the gendered differences of bullying, offering the academic community and grade-school educators new conceptions of how children's interpretations of their experiences with bullying are

gendered. Lacking from previous studies are written accounts of children who have experienced bullying. Writing about their experiences offers students a level of anonymity, which is not possible when using other qualitative methods. The current study offers new insight into how children explain their experiences of being bullied by assessing the use, frequency, and context of their written accounts.

Literature Review

Through socialization, children learn "through the use *of* language" and are "socialized to *use* language" (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986:163 emphasis added). From this perspective, children gain a sense of their social order, including how to appropriately "do" their gender (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; see also West and Zimmerman 1987). Children may therefore be taught how to conform to traditional gender roles through their use of language. Scholars from sociology, anthropology, and psychology offer various approaches to understanding the study of language (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Sociologists specifically pay attention to how language may reinforce or challenge various inequalities. For instance, a common lived experience for many school-aged children is bullying. Children may (unknowingly) reinforce or challenge gender inequalities in their communication patterns. First, we must consider the implications of understanding language socialization as it pertains to gender inequalities. Next, we can consider how bullying serves as a salient interaction in which children's explanations are largely shaped by traditional gendered ways of communication.

Learning Gender through Language

There is a reciprocal relationship between language and social attitudes and therefore, examining language has the ability to "bring into sharper focus real-world imbalances and inequities" (Lakoff 2004: 69). Linguistics is the scientific study of language, which seeks to understand the "nature and workings of language" (Cameron 1992:18). Often, one's grammar, phonology (sounds in language), lexicon (vocabulary or wordbook), and syntax (order of words) are the primary focus when interpreting language (for examples see Coates 2004 and Weatherall 2002). Sociolinguistics, on the other hand, is a subcategory of linguistics and focuses on language and social interaction (Cameron 1992). In other words, sociolinguistics examines how social interaction influences language and how language is shaped by society.

Theoretically, sociolinguistics is influenced by sociology and feminism (see Cameron 1992) and contends that gender inequalities are reflected in language (Trudgill 1995). Sociolinguistic Deborah Tannen (1990) takes a cross-cultural approach to gender and language and asserts that women and men speak different dialects, or "genderlects". Women and men have different ways and styles of communicating, but neither genderlect is superior to the other (Tannen 1990). Tannen's (1990) genderlect theory explains why there is often miscommunication between the sexes, though she encourages the appreciation of each equally. Though still used by sociolingustics, Tannen's theory fails to recognize how power relates to gender and language. Increasingly, sociolinguistic researchers are examining how children become "linguistically competent," which includes formal rules of language (Coates 2004: 147) and may contribute to gender inequalities (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986).

Linguistic lessons learned in childhood and adolescence shape linguistic patterns as adults, which may reinforce gender differences. For instance, girls are encouraged to be more talkative than boys and routinely outscore boys in verbal competence, from infancy to early adolescence (Coates 2004). Girls overwhelmingly learn language faster than boys and some studies suggest that girls "…are superior in terms of comprehension, size of vocabulary, reading ability, handling of complex expression such as the modals, etc." (Coates 2004: 149-150; Weatherall 2002). Not only are girls socialized to be more verbally expressive, they are also taught "appropriate women's speech," which requires politeness and avoidance of profane words (Lakoff 1973; Speer 2005). Patterns of women's language include the use of tag questions, rising intonations, and use of "hedges" which includes words such as "well" and "kinda" (Lakoff 1973; Speer 2005).

The result of these language patterns reinforces the notion that women's speech is not taken seriously. Tag questions require reassurance or approval, while rising intonations and "hedges" suggest hesitancy (Lakoff 1973). If girls fulfill "appropriate women's speech", they are not necessarily rewarded (Lakoff 1973; Speer 2005:34). Rather, the speech patterns that girls learn reinforce their subordination in a patriarchal society. As adults, women are perceived as weak, passive, or disinterested if they do not speak their mind and assert themselves in various situations (Lakoff 2004; Schur 1983). Lakoff (1973:51) explains, "…the behavior a woman learns as 'correct' prevents her from being taken seriously as an individual, and further is considered 'correct' and necessary for a woman precisely because society does *not* consider her seriously as an individual." However, if girls do not fulfill these appropriate forms of communication, they are reprimanded for speaking out of turn, speaking too loudly, or more generally not

speaking “lady like” (Lakoff 2004; Trudgill 1995; Schur 1983). This creates a language double-bind for girls and women. If they fulfill appropriate women’s speech, they are not taken seriously and if they break away from women’s speech, they are seen as too masculine (Lakoff 1973; Schur 1983; Speer 2005).

Whereas girls are socialized to be emotionally and linguistically expressive, boys are socialized to be emotionally and linguistically inexpressive (Johnson 1994). Subsequently, boys and men are not confronted with a language double-bind, but instead are confronted with their own standards that reinforce heteronormative masculine behavior (Johnson 1994). Boys learn early on that in tense moments they should remain “cool head[ed]” and in control of their emotions (Johnson 1994:86; Lorber 1994). If boys are unable to remain calm and in control, the only socially appropriate emotion to then show is anger (Johnson 1994; Lorber 1994).

As a group, men maintain power within institutions and interactions (Johnson 1994; Lorber 1994). Masculinity must be understood not only in relation to how it compares to femininity, but instead as a group of traits that maintain men’s dominance and prestige over women (Johnson 1994; Sattel 1983). In regards to language, Spender (1985) proclaims that “man-made” language is sexist because those in power (men) have the means to “name the world from their own perspective, and create a language that suits their own ends” (Speer 2005:38). As a result, boys are socialized to use language differently than girls. Similarly, Sattel (1983) suggests that boys are not inexpressive because they have been socialized to control their emotions; rather, they have been socialized to aspire to prestigious and powerful positions (see also Spender 1985). To illustrate this power, boys and men partake in “unemotional rationality” in which they

maintain power and control in various situations (Sattel 1983: 120). What at first appears as men being inexpressive or aloof may indeed be an intentional decision to reframe from sharing emotions and thereby ensuring that their position remains primary (Sattel 1983; Spender 1985). Spender (1985:47) elaborates, "Men who may wish to stay in control of conversation may quite accurately perceive that the disclosure of their emotions leads to a reduction in control, with the result that they may not find the prospect of self-revelation an enticing one."

In addition to learning gender specific linguistic patterns, language serves different functions for girls and boys. Aiming to maintain relationships and establish closeness with their peers, girls' talk is collaboration-oriented (Coates 2004; Maltz and Borker 2007), also referred to as rapport talk (Tannen 1990). When confronted with conflict, girls use language as a means to compromise, understand, or avoid further conflict. Meanwhile, boys' talk is competition-oriented, "report talk", and aims to promote a dominant status, maintain an audience, and draw attention (Coates 2004; Maltz and Borker 2007; Tannen 1990). Since boys are socialized and encouraged to use language as a means to assert their dominance and not express themselves, they often respond with physical violence when confronted with conflict (Coates 2004). These language practices unfold in children's play groups, which often involves gendered scenarios (Cook-Grumperz 2004; Thorne 1997). Similarly, given the amount of time children spend in schools, it is not surprising that gendered language patterns are further solidified through interactions at school (Thorne 1997).

Bullying and Gendered Differences

Childhood bullying has been explored by researchers from various fields, such as psychology and psychiatry (Boulton 1995; Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Deggasega and Nixon 2003; Kumpulainen, Rasanen, and Puura 2001; Olweus 1978), criminology (Hinduja and Patchin 2010; Nofziger 2001), and education (Fried and Fried 1996; Graham and Juvonen 2001). Such studies have greatly informed anti-bullying campaigns and shed light on patterns of bullying behavior. Extending on this discourse, insight from sociolinguistics and gender socialization can further our understandings on how children, based on their gender, interpret their experiences. One important type of interaction that is gendered and experienced by many school-aged children is bullying.

Simply defined, bullying, also referred to as peer mistreatment or peer aggression, is repeated behavior that intends to hurt, threaten, or isolate a person (Olweus 1993; Meyer 2009; Sullivan 2011). Direct (overt) bullying is described as "open attacks on a victim," whereas indirect (covert) bullying is more subtle forms of bullying, such as exclusion or social isolation (Olweus 1993:10; see also Espelage, Mebane, and Swearer 2004). Based on a national survey in America, it is estimated that 1.6 million children in grades 6 through 10 are bullied at least once a week and 1.7 million children bully a peer frequently (Ericson 2001). More recently, it is reported that bullying occurs on a daily or weekly basis in 23% of primary schools, as reported during the 2009-2010 school year in the United States (Roberts et al. 2014). Based on their research with the Bureau of Justice Statistics, Roberts and colleagues (2014: vi) also found that in the span of one school year, approximately 28% of 12 to 18 year-old students were bullied.

Additionally, children partake in various forms of bullying behavior based on their sex. Generally, boys often encounter direct physical forms of bullying, whereas girls often use relational aggression (indirect bullying) as a means to exclude or isolate their peers (Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Espelage et al. 2004; Fried and Fried 1996; Meyer 2009; Olweus 1993; Osterman et al. 1998; Sullivan 2011). While there are clear sex differences pertaining to bullying behavior, examining the gender differences offers new insight. Based on one's sex (biological), there are different cultural and societal rules one is expected to fulfill (gender). Boys are expected to aspire to masculine traits, whereas girls are socialized to be feminine (Bem 1993; Lorber 1994). Sociolinguistics offers a concrete explanation of how gendered differences of language are socialized and may thereby influence one's bullying behavior. For instance, girls' communication is collaboration-orientated and they use language as a means to establish and maintain friendships (Coates 2004; Simmons 2002). Girls often use language as a means of isolating their peers, which is reflected in the high levels of relational-aggression. Meanwhile, boys are more competitive-oriented in their communication style (Coates 2004) and therefore do not rely on discussion to remedy disagreements with peers, resorting rather to physical forms of violence. This explains the higher rates of overt bullying experienced by boys.

How adults react to children's involvement with bullying is also gendered. When girls vocalize their experiences of being mistreated to adults in school, their accounts are often dismissed or not taken seriously (Simmons 2002). Overwhelming, girls who voice their victimization are labeled as "tattle tails" (Simmons 2002), "bossy", "competitive," or "unladylike", and girls who remain non-expressive are deemed "timid" or "nonentity"

(Schur 1983:53). This reflects a speech and interaction double bind for girls; they are scrutinized if they over conform or under conform to various gender norms (Schur 1983). Adults' response to girl's expressive or non-expressive responses to victimization serves as a form of social control.

While girls are often caught in a double bind, it is socially expected that "boys will be boys" and as a result, boys often verbally and physically act out in class. Such behavior is typically tolerated for boys, whereas girls are reprimanded for similar acts (Simmons 2002). This trend solidifies the gender binary of language and can either be reinforced or challenged by teachers (see Thorne 1997). Ultimately, schools serve as a common breeding ground for bullying, as well as a place where gender differences are played out in student's language and involvement in bullying behavior.

To understand bullying in a new light, the current study uses bullying as the social context to uncover how middle school girls and boys make sense of their experiences of being bullied. My research questions include: 1.) Do girls and boys use different words and ways of writing about their experiences of being bullied? and 2.) If differences exist, how do these differences reinforce or challenge the gender binary? Identifying gendered themes may pull into focus some information that may offer new insight for parents and educators who aim to deter future incidences of bullying. In other words, examining *how* girls and boys describe their experiences of being bullied may offer a deeper understanding into the reciprocal relationship between gendered language patterns and bullying behavior.

Data and Methods

Conducted by Stan Davis and Charisse Nixon (2014), the Youth Voice Project is a national survey that focuses primarily on how school-aged children experienced and coped with bullying. Throughout 12 states in the U.S., 31 primary and secondary schools (28 public and 3 private) participated and completed the on-line survey (N=13,177). Participating schools received access to the survey via SurveyMonkey. Students took the survey on computers at their schools, during which time teachers were available for any technical questions or problems. The survey consisted of 33 multiple-choice questions and 12 open-ended questions, for a total of 45 questions. Ages of participants ranged from 11 to 19 years old and 33% of the total number of students in the study were in high school (9^{th}-12^{th} grade), 57% were in middle school (6^{th} – 8^{th}), and 10% were in elementary school (5^{th} grade) (for a full descriptions of the survey, see Davis and Nixon 2014).

Sampling Criteria and Characteristics

The sample for this study was contingent on satisfying three criteria. First, I limited my sample to include only middle school students. Higher rates of bullying are reported by middle school children; therefore students in grades 6^{th}-8^{th} were the focus of this study. Second, respondents had to satisfy Olweus's definition of bullying. Most studies rely on Olweus's definition, so to align with previous literature I too categorized bullying as repeated unwanted behavior that takes place over time. Students were

included in my sample if they answered “every day,” “once a week,” or “two or three times a week” to at least one of the two following questions:

> Q29. In the past month, how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you?
>
> Q30. In the past month, how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?

The third criteria included only respondents who offered a written answer to the coding unit. Children were asked a series of close-ended questions, regarding the type of bullying they experienced and who the culprit was (see Appendix B). Following these questions was an open-ended question, which allowed children to explain more thoroughly what they experienced. Written responses to the following open-ended question was the coding unit:

> Q52. If you feel comfortable, please describe what happened to you [when you were mistreated by a peer]. Because this is a confidential survey, please also tell an adult you trust at school about what happened if you have not already done that. Please do not include any names.

In an attempt to capture more fully the children’s voice, verbatim text is used within the findings. Grammatical and spelling errors were not corrected, since I wanted to stay true to the children’s original written responses.

Once the three criteria were met, the sample yielded a total of 362 girls and 239 boys. Of the sample, most girls (37.6%) and boys (41%) were 12 years old or 13 years old (girls 29.8% and boys 25.5%). Roughly 25% of the girls and 24% of the boys were 11 years old, and there were almost an equal percentage of girls and boys who were 14 years old (8%). Less than 1% of boys were 15 or 16 years old (see Table 3.1). Of the middle school respondents, almost 40% of girls and roughly 41% of boys were in 6^{th} grade, 34.5% of girl and 34.3% of boys were in 7^{th} grade, and 28.9% of girls and 24.2% of boys

were in 8th grade (see Table 3.1). The sample was almost split equally between nonwhites and whites (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics of Middle School Girls and Boys
(Percentages in Parentheses are for All Counts)

	Girls (n=362)	Boys (n=239)
Age		
11 or younger	89 (25%)	58 (24%)
12	136 (38%)	98 (41%)
13	108 (30%)	61 (26%)
14	27 (8%)	19 (8%)
15	0	2 (.8%)
16	0	1 (.4%)
Missing	2 (1%)	0
Grade		
6th Grade	130 (36%)	99 (41%)
7th Grade	128 (35%)	82 (34%)
8th Grade	104 (29%)	58 (24%)
Racial Breakdown		
Native American	11 (3%)	9 (4%)
African-American	21 (6%)	11 (5%)
Hispanic-American	29 (8%)	16 (7%)
Pacific Islander	1 (.3%)	2 (1%)
White	204 (56%)	124 (52%)
Asian-American	11 (3%)	12 (5%)
Multi-racial	29 (8%)	21(9%)
Other	30 (8%)	19 (8%)
Prefer not to answer	20 (6%)	20 (8%)
Missing	6 (2%)	5(2%)
TOTAL	362 (100%)	239 (100%)

Analytic Strategy

A qualitative content analysis was conducted to answer the outlined research questions, which sought to examine how girls and boys explain their experiences of being victimized. Whereas quantitative content analysis is mainly deductive and requires the researcher to count words and focus on the objective content of text, qualitative content

analysis surpasses this requirement and is inductive, enabling the researcher to examine the subjective interpretation of the underlying meaning of the initial counts (Graneheim and Lundman 2004; Krippendorff 2013; Morgan 1993). Based on my research questions, I was most interested in understanding the deeper meaning of the quantity and content of what girls and boys choose to share when prompted to reflect on their experiences of being victimized. I therefore completed a summative approach to qualitative content analysis, which required me to first identity and quantify words "…with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content" (Hsieh and Shannon 2005: 1285).

First, I examined the manifest content. This required me to outline how many words girls and boys used in their respective responses. To accomplish this, I used the "word count" function in Microsoft Word. I first completed a word count of each individual written response for girls and boys. For simplicity, I grouped word counts in groups of five (see Table 2). Girls fell into categories with more numbers than boys. For instance, approximately 12% of girls used 26-30 words in their response, whereas less than 7% of boys fell within this category. Girls (28.5%) used 31 or more words more often than boys (10%). Once the manifest content was identified, I moved onto the latent content to discern the deeper meaning of these counts. Specifically, it was apparent that girls used more words to describe their experiences and girls and boys used gendered language to make sense of their experiences. The analysis of this data is presented in the discussion.

Findings

When prompted to reflect on what they experienced in regards to bullying, some middle school girls and boys surpassed simple answers and included descriptive details of their experiences. Based on what children chose to include in their responses, two key findings are outlined. These findings include how much information was shared and the content of accounts, and attempts to save face. Within the second theme, two sub-themes emerged within the second theme, including girls' use of clarifying statements and boys' displaying a tough guise.

Quantity and Content of Words

Aligning with the literature, girls were more verbose than boys in their responses. After completing a word count for all participants, the highest percentage of boys (20.5%) used between 11-15 or 16-20 words in their response, whereas the highest percentage of girls (28.4%) used over 31 words in their response (see Table 3.2). Having the opportunity to write their responses offers the participants a level of anonymity that is not achievable through face-to-face interviews or participant observation. Therefore, girls' lengthy responses sheds light on their willingness to convey their stories, whereas boys' lack of lengthy responses may reflect how they have been socialized to be verbally and emotionally inexpressive.

Table 3.2: Counts of the Number of Words Used
(Percentages in Parentheses of Word Counts)

	Girls (n=362)	Boys (n=239)
1-5 words	16 (4.4%)	35 (14.6%)
6-10 words	60 (16.6%)	48 (20.1%)
11-15 words	53 (14.6%)	49 (20.5%)
16-20 words	37 (10.2%)	49 (20.5%)
21-25 words	50 (13.8%)	19 (8%)
26-30 words	43(11.9%)	15 (6.3%)
31+ words	103 (28.5%)	24 (10%)

In addition to the quantity of words used by participants, the content of the responses is very telling of gender differences. Specifically, girls offered many more details pertaining to their experience of being bullied, whereas boy's responses were more "matter of fact." Girls often included how the situation made them feel, events leading up to the incident, who was involved, and what happened after the incident. For instance, a white girl includes details pertaining to the event that occurred in first grade:

> i was walking down to the office in 1st grade to drop off the atendance and a bunch of tall eighth graders stopped me and would not let me by. so i told a teacher and she sent someone to come with me and when that did not work i told a teacher what was happening and she took care of it then it never happened again.

The following example illustrates one girl's experience with bullying in successive grades.

> There are a couple of people last year, who would make fun of me because of my being a little overweight body type, and they would constantly pick on me, and talk about me behind my back, but this year, I feel she is kind of doing it, because when I was walking from my bus stop, she started to yell that I'm fat, and I don't belong on this planet, but when I'm at school, she'll smile at me, and talk to me once in a while like nothings happened. And I don't get it. I think when she's around me, she's nice, and when she's not, she constantly talks about me... I just want it to stop..... and for people to like me the way I am...

This example is illustrative of how this young girl desires to be treated, with respect and acceptance by her peers, which is apparent by the clarity and firmness in her written

voice. In an attempt to understand the motives of her attacker, this girl also sheds insight into the insidious nature of relational aggression (see also Simmons 2002).

Boys, on the other hand, offered more concise responses (i.e., they often shared specifics of the story's beginning, middle, *or* end). At times, responses from boys included emotions and efficacy against bullying, such as voicing their disagreement with how bullying was dealt with in their school. Many of the boy's responses lacked a full description of the event, including what they were feeling and how they made sense of why they were targeted in the first place. For instance, a white boy in 6th grade said:

> I get pushed around and people are constantly making fun of me for being Jewish with such phrases as "You're such a Jew." and "Don't Jew me." It really makes me mad and I would like to see a change. Also I get physically harassed some of the time too. And in sixth grade the teachers constantly bullied me, humiliated me, and called me names. The system for bullying discipline is terrible. Everything is just swept under the rug.

The comments offered by this sixth grader reveals that he is quite aware of the motives for why he was bullied, namely that he is Jewish. The expression of emotion was atypical for boys in the data. In contrast, this boy's comments suggest that he is angry at how his peers treated him and disappointed by the teachers and system, which have seemingly failed him. He apparently, and rightfully so, seeks justice and calls for change.

Topics pertaining to the frequency and types of bullying are exemplified in the following comment made by a boy in fourth grade:

> Last year and all through fourth grade there was a group of people who consistently caused drama that would always end in someone's feelings getting hurt. That same group of people started spreading rumors that I was a drug dealer/user.

Although it is clear that this boy experienced bullying over a few years, he does not offer information pertaining to how he responded or how the routine mistreatment made him

feel. He does, however, speak about the general occurrence, indicating that the perpetrators were mistreating other students as well.

Although girls have on average longer comments, it was a boy who offered the longest comment (346 words, the next highest count being 191 words, offered by a girl). Within his response, much information was revealed about what happened, how he addressed being bullied, a rationale for why he chose to confront his attacker, as well as his feelings of anger, pity, empathy, and appreciation.

> Well Last year I was being bullied by one student and he really went out of his way to make me feel bad. At first I told my parents about it and they said to punch him in the nose and that might solve it. Then even though I kept on telling him to stop he didn't. The bullying went on for almost a whole school year. I talked to teachers about him and they tried to get him to stop but he didn't. I started having to ask the teacher if I could move away from him so that he couldn't harass me. Then about three quarters of the way through the time he bullied me he started to spread a rumor that I looked up men's balls on the internet. He then started to call me a gay fagot every time he saw me. The day the bullying finally stopped I made a decision. I was going to talk to the assistant principle about him to get him to stop and if that didn't work I was going to beat him up. Now I could beat him up too because I had So much pent up anger that I could completely obliterate him because when I go into my little fight mode I cant be stop and I don't notice anyone trying to stop me. So when I went to the vice principle person she called the bully down. When he came in he seemed like he was very afraid of that women, so afraid that I felt sorry for him then until he looked at me and regained his composer. The madness finally stopped that day and I haven't seen him since then until a month ago where he was being mean again but he left me alone. I am thankful to the teachers for helping me stop the madness, and I am very sorry if someone else started to get harassment from him like my friend where he threw her phone at the ground and it broke and it no longer works.

Given that gay youth or youth that are presumed to be gay are especially vulnerable to being targets of bullying, this boy's accounts of his emotional turmoil and frustration are especially noteworthy to consider. This particular boy offered a rich account of what he experienced, including a yearlong bout of being harassed by a peer and name-calling. His emotions ranged from feelings of frustration to rage to sympathy

toward the individual who was bullying him. He responded by seeking advice and support from his parents, teachers, and finally the vice principal. Although he seemingly disapproved of how adults (at home and school) reacted to him being bullied, he ultimately was grateful for the system and the people that afforded him safety. The rationalization of actions, thoughts, and feelings are quintessential markers of masculinity, and in this case, the boy rationalizes his frustration and anger with a justification of why he could and should inflict harm on the aggressor.

Attempts to Save Face

When asked to explain what happened to them, girls overwhelmingly shared more details than boys. In addition to explaining what happened to them, some children elaborated and included attempts to "set the record straight" by stating the validity of various rumors or defending their perpetrators. Specifically, girls included clarifying statements, as though they were talking directly to the reader and defending themselves. Clarifying statements were made after some girls described various rumors that were spread about them, clarifying that such rumors "are not true," as exemplified in the following accounts:

> my friend was saying stuff to my other friend and it was not true (it was about me)and she was geting on my nerves. Also i said something in fith grade and it was funny to them but not to me and they brought it up this year.
>
> My former best friend told lies to my friends. She said things like,""She thinks your fat and ugly."" Or, ""You have ugly clothing and your poor."" She spread a rumor that I said these things about my friends wchich is not true.
>
> My former best friend told my other friends that I said that they are fat and ugly, this is definitely not true because my parents have teached me that bullying is not safe and I can get in trouble.

> three girls started rumors that i waz pregnent and that i had razor blades then to find out that this was not true they then tryed to jump me i hve had theses girls and others call me fat ugly and other very unapproipate names

Girls' thorough responses and use of clarifying statements may be an attempt to gain control over a situation, in which they are victimized and have no control. Within their responses, girls' language patterns suggest that they are attempting to use language as a means of "righting" a "wrong" they experienced.

On the other hand, boys' use of clarifying statements was not to necessarily "set the record straight", but instead to explain the insignificance of the event or as a means of other boys trying to assert themselves. The following written accounts reflect this:

> Well i ment threatened on the questions but it wasn't bad those people were just trying to act tuff

> People are just that way, they will do what they have to to get the respect or things they want.

> they would say names and make jokes about me that didnt need to be said so I held it in and just laughed about it

> ive been hit and kicked by some kids trying to impress others, more like show off they bother me every day saying stupid comment that i know aren't true

These responses suggest that some boys were putting on a "tough guise," downplaying the severity of what they experienced and even rationalizing that they were targeted because their peers were attempting to "act tuff" (see Connell 2005 and Katz 2006). Common also, were boys making general statements and not specifying individual peers who harassed them. Linguistically, making generalizations and taking the focus off of "I" statements serves to shift the victimization to a general "other", thereby avoiding direct victimization. As a result, boys are able to maintain their position of power by avoiding

"I" statements and explaining that the acts were common occurrences and a result of peers trying to assert themselves.

Boys who attempted to rationalize the motives of their attackers were reflective of masculine traits may serve to reinforce the notion that "boys will be boys" and the (physical) bullying they experience is a "nature" component of their childhood. These responses suggest that some boys have indeed embodied this notion instead of admitting their victim status; these boys have accepted that their peers may use them as targets to "show off".

Discussion

When prompted to reflect on what they experienced in regards to bullying, some middle school girls and boys surpassed simple answers and included descriptive details of their experiences. Based on what children chose to include in their responses, two key findings are outlined. These findings include how *much* was shared and the underlying message of *how* the information was presented.

Tell Me About It

The quantity of how much girls and boys choose to share (as illustrated in the word counts) is very telling of gendered and linguistic differences. Aligning with the literature (see Coates 2004 and Weatherall 2002), girls in this sample were more verbose than boys. Given that girls are socialized to be more expressive, this is not entirely surprising. However, within society at large, women's voices are often silenced and are

not given the same amount of respect as men's voices (Johnson 2005; Lakoff 1975; Meyerhoff 2004). This reflects our patriarchal society, in which men maintain positions of power and authority and masculine traits are ranked superior to female traits (Bem 1993; Johnson 2005; Spender 1985). As a result, not only are women's voices not given the same respect as men's, their voices and perspectives are greatly overlooked or silenced. Focusing on the verbosity of female respondents in this study is therefore especially interesting. Girls who are vocal about being bullied are often considered to be "tattle tails", "bossy", or "unladylike" and not always taken serious by adults (see Simmons 2002). Girls' involvement in relational aggression is often seen as a rite of passage; something that all girls must go through (Simmons 2002). However, findings from this study suggest that most girls were not telling on their friends or shifting the blame, but instead included attempts to defend themselves and explain the incident in its entirely, to avoid any confusion. The notion that all girls must go through relational aggression as a rite of passage should therefore be eliminated and girls' accounts of being mistreated should be acknowledged without prejudice. In short, it would benefit anti-bullying advocates to genuinely "hear" the girls' standpoints. This will require adults to consider that girls' have been socialized to use language differently than boys and as a result, girls and boys talk and write about bullying in different ways.

On the other hand, boys offered fewer and shorter responses compared to girls. However, to argue that boys did not share a lot because they are socialized to be non-expressive is too simple of a conclusion. As noted previously, sociolinguists suggest that what men do *not* say, is just as important as what they *do* say. Sattel (1983: 120) explains, "Keeping cool, keeping distant as others challenge you or make demands upon you, is a

strategy for keeping the upper hand." Boys' low response rate to the open-ended question may therefore be an intentional attempt to control the situation and maintain their position of power by not divulging what they experienced. Although these boys were victimized by their peers, they were able to maintain their status by not divulging or admitting their victimization. By not sharing what they experienced, boys are not admitting their victimization and thereby maintaining their position of dominance.

It's Not What *You Say, It's* How *You Say It*

Not only was the quantity of the words telling of gender differences, but also important is noting that when children *did* offer a response, *how* they shared their response is gendered. Girls offered more descriptive details of who was involved, why the situation occurred, how the situation made them feel, how they responded to the situation, and what happened as a result of their actions. On the other hand, boys overwhelming shared information specific to what happened, generally leaving out their emotions and details leading up to and following the event. Unique to the girls was the tendency to defend themselves, whereas boys attempted to "save face". Considering the motives of these responses would be pure speculation, but important conclusions can be drawn from focusing on the language choices that girls and boys made.

For instance, girls were using rapport talk or collaboration-oriented talk (Coates 2004; Maltz and Borker 2007; Tannen 1990) when they shared their feelings and relayed in-depth stories. Girls' responses mirrored storytelling, in which they reflected on their self-esteem being lowered, feeling sad, depressed, "feeling left out," "lonely," or "out of the loop." Girls have been socialized to be more expressive and share their emotions.

Therefore, using descriptive and emotional words aligns with gender socialization and traditional gender rules.

Boys who avoided admitting their victim status and instead described their perpetrators as "just trying to act tuff" or "get respect" suggests that these boys were partaking in report talk or competition-oriented talk (see Coates 2004; Maltz and Borker 2007; Tannen 1990). Boys often talk less than girls, however when they do talk, it is often only to make them look in control, competitive, or independent (Coates 2004; Tannen 1990). Therefore, when boys described their bullies as "just kids trying to impress others", they are indirectly supporting masculine traits that demand control, competition, and intimidation. These victims do not readily (if at all) admit their victim status, since to do so would call into question their masculinity.

Limitations

A key goal of this study was to understand the gendered differences in how girls and boys explain their experiences of being bullied. Conducting a qualitative content analysis enabled me to examine the trends and themes of such accounts. However, the quantity and thoroughness of responses might also be influenced by the children's typing abilities. If children lacked the patience to type their full answers or lacked typing skills, their accounts were not captured in this data. Also, because I relied on the open-ended responses of a national survey, I was not able to probe for more thorough responses from any of the participants. Had the data relied on face-to-face interviews, more insight from sociolinguistics could have been applied. For instance, utterances, pauses, and inflections

in voice could have telling gendered differences that are not captured in written responses.

Another key goal of this study enabled me to use children's voices as a standpoint to better understand the lived experiences of children who have experienced bullying. Although I use children's direct words for analysis, ultimately, it was my interpretation of the data. Future studies might consider incorporating children in the research process. By enabling children to devise the questions and highlight the themes they find most significant, such studies have the potential to shed new light into understanding bullying directly from those who experience it.

Implications

At first glance these gendered differences in describing their experiences may appear that girls take incidences of bullying more seriously (or "to heart") than boys. Boys, on the other hand, let incidences of bullying simply "roll of their backs". However, when taking into account insight from sociolinguistics, we recognize that these gendered differences are reflected in language patterns that girls and boys learn. Lakoff (1973) argues that linguistic change and social change are inseparable. Therefore, to remedy women's secondary status to men, women may opt to adapt men's linguistic patterns, which she defines as "neutral language" (Lakoff 1973; see also Speer 2005). Likewise, one might propose that for women to gain the same respect, power, and control as men, they should indeed become men – suggesting that women, as the *second sex*, cannot merit power or respect without adopting masculine traits. Instead of proposing women let go of their speech patterns and adopt men's speech patterns, others argue that each linguistic

pattern has its benefits (Tannen 1990) and women should not assimilate to men's speech patterns to gain respect. Given that girls are more proficient and expressive than boys, others argue that boys have a lot to learn from girls' speech patterns.

In an attempt to dismantle the gender binary and promote a gender spectrum, gendered language must be addressed when considering children's lived experiences of being bullied. Although women's voices are routinely silenced within society, their patterns of language enable them to thoroughly convey their lived experience while remaining an active listener within conversations (for more information on gender and conversation, see Coates 2004 and Tannen 1990). The overabundance of girls' storytelling their experiences compared to boys speaks volumes to the gendered nature of how girls and boys are socialized to use language. Overall, girls are more proficient in language (Coates 2004: 149-150; Weatherall 2002), which explains why many of their responses were thorough and resembled storytelling.

It would therefore serve parents and educators to listen to girls' accounts of bullying, instead of writing off such verbosity as typical girl talk (see Simmons 2002). Having been socialized to use words to describe their feelings and experiences, girls' explanations of experiencing bullying can offer adults valuable insight into the insidious nature of relational aggression. By giving girls' the space and respect to openly discuss their experiences, adults may offer victims and perpetrators of relational aggression alternative and healthy ways to use their words. In other words, adults might consider how girls' use of words can be reframed to embody more pro-social characteristics and less aggression.

While men maintain positions of power within our patriarchal society, their patterns of language reinforce a tough guise, which serves to silence men. The rationalization of actions, thoughts, and feelings are quintessential markers of masculinity, and as suggested by this study, boy's rationalize their frustration and anger with a justification of why they could and should inflict harm on the aggressor. Boys have been socialized to control their emotions as a means of maintaining their power in various situations (Sattel 1983; Spender 1985), which may explain why most of the boys' responses were concise and lacked specific details.

Instead of attempting to change how boys use language, parents and educators would benefit by working with skills boys already possess. Based on this study, it is evident that boys do not verbally process incidences of bullying and instead often embody a stoic silence. While one cannot discern if boy's "shrug off" attitude suggests that incidences of bullying were less severe compared to girls, such behavior is telling of gender differences. Responses that reflect boys attempting to embody a tough guise are especially telling of how engrained gender differences are for children.

CHAPTER IV

"STANDING UP OR JOKING AROUND": GENDERED DIFFERENCES IN COPING WITH BULLYING

Abstract

Bullying is a widespread problem in schools across America. Previous studies have noted patterns in this behavior, focusing on traits that make some children more at risk of being bullied than others. One factor that may encourage future victimization is how the victim initially copes with their victimization. This study extends on previous works by examining how one's gender influences how she or he copes with being bullied. To examine this, data from a national survey, the Youth Voice Project, was utilized. Aligning with the approach/avoidance model, children in this sample used avoidance techniques including distancing and externalizing, and approach techniques including seeking social support and problem solving. Humor was also a frequently reported response to bullying, used primarily by boys. Girls relied primarily on seeking social support as a means of coping with being bullied. Boys' reliance on humor and girls' reliance on their mothers and peers reflect gender socialization. Suggestions for future researchers and educators conclude the paper.

Introduction

There is widespread agreement that bullying is a serious problem in schools, which affects a large amount of children. In 2011, the Bureau of Justice Studies (2013) found that 28% of 12 to 18 year olds reported being bullied. In 2013, this percentage dropped to 22% (U.S. Department of Education 2015). While there has been a gradual decline in bullying over the years (see Finkelhor 2013 and U.S. Department of Education 2015), the behavior persists across schools in the U.S. Several studies have examined this social phenomena aiming to understand, intervene, and prevent bullying behavior (for examples see Meyer 2009; Sanders and Phye 2004; Sullivan 2011). Great concern has been focused on the short and long-term effects of bullying, as well as how children cope with being bullied.

Based on their research in Midwestern schools in America, Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler (1992) found that of their sample, 76% of children (ages 12-18) reported being bullied during their school years. However, when questioned of the severity of their experiences, only 14% of children (both girls and boys) reported experiencing a severe response (Hoover et al. 1992). This suggests that while incidences of bullying may occur frequently and are perceived by adults to be a major problem, the actual impact of such cases may not be very concerning for some children. Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner (2002) sought to discern why bullying is more cause for alarm for some children, compared to others. They argue that depending on a child's coping resources, even a relatively benign incident may be perceived as a great concern if the child has poor coping techniques (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002).

Children's coping strategies may help pacify future incidences of victimization or exacerbate them. While some studies have examined sex differences in how girls and boys respond to bullying, such studies have not thoroughly explored how gender plays a pivotal role in coping strategies. To help fill this gap within the literature, this study examines how gender socialization influences different coping strategies for girls and boys. Such insight may help investigate whether certain strategies are more effective.

Literature Review

To better understand how a victim of bullying copes with their victimization, a brief overview of bullying behavior is provided below. Following the brief discussion on characteristics of bullies and victims, as well as sex and gender differences, is a summary on coping techniques often used by victims of bullying.

Overview of Bullying

Bullying is behavior that happens on a regular basis, is intended to hurt, scare, or threaten the target, and often involves an imbalance of power (Olweus 1993). While there have been various adaptations to this definition (see Finkelhor et al. 2011), there is overwhelming agreement that school-placed bulling is a serious problem in the U.S. (Meyer 2009; Sullivan 2011). Previous studies have examined patterns and trends of those involved in bullying behavior, including characteristics of bullies and victims, the socio-behavioral and mental health consequences, and differences based on sex and

gender. Theories on coping strategies offer additional insight into how victims respond to being bullied.

Characteristics of bullies and victims. Previous studies have discerned clear characteristics that distinguish bullies from victims. While there are traits that differentiate victims from bullies, some evidence suggests that many children who bully are victims themselves (referred to as bully/victim). Bullies typically have a favorable view of violence, are assertive, dominant, impulsive, and unapologetic towards their victims (Sullivan 2011). Some perpetrators who do not embody these antisocial traits, act out because of their own insecurities and are classified as anxious bullies (see Sullivan 2011).

Meanwhile, victims are often identified by their insecurities, unassertiveness and exhibit characteristics such as shyness, anxiety, depression, and loneliness (see Sullivan 2011). Bullies often target these children because of their social isolation, since the victims do not have fellow friends to stand up for them. Most commonly, children are targets of bullying based on their appearance (i.e. gender nonconformity and size) (see Meyer 2009; Sullivan 2011), sex (specifically sexual harassment), sexual orientation (lesbians, gays, and bisexuals) (see Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Meyer 2009; Underwood and Rosen 2004), race/ethnicity (see Fox and Stallworth 2005; Spriggs et al. 2007), or disabilities and special needs (physical and mental) (see Rose 2004).

Socio-behavioral and mental health consequences of bullying. The immediate and long-term effects of being the victim or perpetrator of bullying warrant attention. When

compared to their peers, children who are bullied are more likely to have lower self-esteem and self-confidence, poor health, exhibit anxious and depressive traits, be stigmatized by their peers, have suicide ideology, and have a difficult time learning in school (Bond et al. 2001; Espelage and Swearer 2003; Sourander et al. 2007; Sullivan 2011; Wheeler and Baron 1994).

Meanwhile, children who bully are more likely to drop out of school (Townsend et al. 2008), experience depression (Espelage and Swearer 2003), use drugs and alcohol (Nansel et al. 2001), and in extreme cases, resort to school shootings (Kimmel and Mahler 2003). Given the prevalence of depression experienced by bully/victims, bullies, and victims, is it not surprising to note the growing rate of children who contemplate suicide (Hinduja and Patchin 2010; Swearer et al. 2004). The immediate consequences of bullying, from either the perpetrator or victim standpoint, are clear.

Sex and gender differences in bullying behavior. To better understand bullying, researchers have focused on potential gender differences in experiences. General themes of previous studies suggest that girls primarily partake in relational aggression (covert), whereas boys enact physical (overt) forms of bullying (Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Espelage et al. 2004; Sullivan 2011). Overt forms of bullying are easily detectable, and therefore likely to receive immediate intervention and attention (Simmons 2002). However, girls' use of subtle forms of bullying are often hidden and silenced, making relational aggression harder to detect and address (Simmons 2002).

This may also explain why boys are perceived as being bullies and victims more than girls (Espelage, Mebane, and Swearer 2004; Olweus 1993). More recently however,

studies have found that girls' friendships are breeding grounds for relational aggression (Dellasega and Nixon 2003; Simmons 2002). Girls experience relational aggression from other girls, as well as sexual harassment from boys (Gruber and Fineran 2008; Meyer 2009). Boys, on the other hand, are primarily victimized by other boys (Olweus 1993).

Coping Techniques

There is widespread agreement that to eradicate bullying, bullies themselves must be stopped. This is evident in that many interventions and anti-bullying campaigns focus primarily or exclusively on bullies (see Keith 2011 for a comprehensive review). However, we must remember that often times, bullies are victims themselves (Olweus 1993). To stop the cycle of victimization then, we must consider that victims too play an important role in dissuading or encouraging future incidences of bullying. Some studies suggest that victims of bullying may actually instigate future incidences of bullying, depending on how they respond to being bullied (Cowie and Berdondini 2002; Olweus 1993). Therefore, it is important to investigate different coping techniques and examine how these strategies may deter or encourage future cases of bullying from occurring.

Fields and Prinz (1997:937) summarize, "Coping is continually changing behavioral and cognitive efforts to manage external and/or internal demands that are appraised as exceeding the individual's resources" (see also Lazarus and Folkman 1984). In other words, coping requires attention and action to solve a problem using effective solutions (see Yuksel-Sahin 2015). Given that children do not have mature cognitive and social development, their coping techniques differ from adults (Fields and Prinz 1997).

For instance, children have less power and status than adults and children lack experience with stressors, which influences how children perceive and cope with various stressors in their lives (Fields and Prinz 1997). As a result, the significance of stressors may be magnified for children who lack experience and effective coping strategies (Fields and Prinz 1997).

Psychologists and social psychologists have especially contributed to research on child-coping strategies (for examples see Fields and Prinz 1997; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002; Mahady and Craig 2000). There are a number of different conceptual and theoretical models of coping strategies that are applied to children and adolescents (for complete descriptions see Fields and Prinz 1997; see also Causey and Dubow 1992). One model, the approach/avoidance model, has been used in previous studies pertaining specifically to bullying behavior and is the focus for the current study. Simply defined, approach strategies are often characterized as adaptive since it involves actively responding to the stressor, whereas avoidance strategies involve avoiding the stressor and are often deemed maladaptive (Fields and Prinz 1997). Students may experience stressors from academic demands, peer relations, family turmoil, or other related experiences. For the purpose of this paper, stressors will refer to incidences of bullying.

Approach strategies. Approach strategies, often called problem focused coping, are often used by proactive or aggressive victims and include attempts of the victim to face their stressors directly, either by seeking social support or figuring out a plan of action and following through (Fields and Prinz 1997; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002; Roth and Cohen 1986). Such strategies either call upon the inclusion of others

(seeking social support) or being independent and solving the problem on their own, which may have gendered differences (see Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002).

Children who are involved in social activities, such as sports or art, are more likely to cope with bullying in adaptive ways (Yuksel-Sahin 2015). Peer support has also been documented as a successful means to cope with bullying (see Cowie and Sharp 1996; Cowie and Olafsson 2000). Peers can serve as support to actively combat bullying in three ways: utilizing conflict resolution, counseling-based approaches, or befriending the target (Cowie and Sharp 1996; see also Cowie and Olafsson 2000). In general, these types of peer support involve offering skills to the victim to enable them to resolve the situation, occur relatively soon after the incident, and encourage the avoidance of placing blame and instead enable open communication between parties (Cowie and Sharp 1996; see also Cowie and Olafsson 2000). Interventions that encourage the involvement of peers to address bullying "…recognize that pupils themselves have the potential to assume a helpful role in tackling bullying behaviour" (Cowie and Sharp 1996:80; see also Cowie and Olafsson 2000). Such an approach not only helps the victim, but may also benefit the helpers since prior to being sought out, the helpers might have merely been bystanders (see Cowie and Olafsson 2000). Therefore, the helpers' sense of usefulness is increased, knowing that they are able to assist their peers (Cowie and Olafsson 2000).

Approach strategies may have short-term negative effects of increased anxiety, since the strategy requires the victim to confront their stressor. However, studies suggest that the short-term costs are outweighed by the long-term gains, since approach oriented responses are likely to ultimately dissuade the aggressor from further bullying the victim (Fields and Prinz 1997; Roth and Cohen 1986). Overall, children who utilize problem-

solving strategies are able to "assert themselves against the bully's behaviour, convey that the bully's actions are socially intolerable, and overcome the threat of bullying to defend themselves" (Wilton et al. 2000:240). The anger and contempt that victims exude is replaced with shaming the bully to feel guilty about their actions (Wilton et al. 2000).

Avoidance strategies. Whereas approach strategies reflect children taking direct action to alter their stressors, avoidance strategies reflect children's attempts to "manage their cognitive or emotional reactions" (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002:268; see also Fields and Prinz 1997). Avoidance strategies, also referred to as emotional reactions, are often used by passive victims and include passive coping attempts. For instance, children might avoid or ignore the stressor (a behavioral strategy) or they may attempt to negate threat (a cognitive strategy) (Field and Prinz 1997; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002; Roth and Cohen 1986). Emotional strategies that are classified as avoidance techniques are those in which the child avoids or distances themselves emotionally from the stressor (Roth and Cohen 1986).

Children who lack skills on how to manage their emotions may act out in maladaptive ways, such as yelling, shouting, or attacking their stressor (Wilton et al. 2000). While such behavior requires the victim to respond directly to their stressor (either verbally or physically), within the literature, such responses are not considered approach strategies (see Wilton et al. 2000). Since the victim lacks the skills to control their emotions in a positive way, counter aggressive responses are considered emotional reacting strategies (see Wilton et al. 2000) or externalizing approaches (see Causey and Dubow 1992). Counter aggressive responses to stressors are overwhelming maladaptive.

Based on their research in elementary schools in Canada, Wilton and colleagues (2000) found that when aggressive victims respond to their bullies with counter-attacks, they often lose the fight. On the other hand, children were 13 times more likely to de-escalate and resolve a bullying interaction if they used a problem-solving approach instead of an aggressive coping response (Wilton, Craig, and Pepler 2000). Bullies seek to dominant their victims therefore, children who respond to their bullies with anger or contempt may likely ignite further retaliation from the bully, therefore placing the victim at greater risk of future attacks (Wilton et al. 2000).

Children who often use avoidance coping strategies are characterized by their anxious and withdrawn demeanor. When confronted with aggression, these children are incapable of confronting their bully and therefore, the victim's "fear and anxiety mount, and they either withdraw or capitulate" (Wilton et al. 2000:242). As a result, a "bully's situational expectations of suffering and gain" are satisfied when a target uses passive coping techniques (Wilton et al. 2000:242). Initially, avoiding their stressor may bring about a sense of hope and relief, however such benefits are short-lived (Roth and Cohen 1986). However, overarching research suggests that continued use of avoidance techniques may increase the child's emotional numbness, thereby minimizing the likelihood of later utilizing more adaptive coping techniques (Roth and Cohen 1986). Not only are passive coping strategies likely to bring on future attacks, but the long-term effects to the victims include greater risk for depression and low self-esteem (see Wilton et al. 2000).

It is important to note that there are benefits and costs to approach and avoidance strategies; neither response to victimization is an absolute "best" practice. Instead, Roth

and Cohen (1986) suggest that the benefits and costs of each strategy be weighed, noting that the effectiveness of each strategy in deterring future attacks may be dependent on the specific type of aggression. Also, Salmivallie and colleagues (1996) found that these categories were not "pure" and instead, some victims used two or all three coping techniques when responding to being bullied. The current study does not attempt to discern if approach or avoidance strategies work best for children. Instead, the main aim of this study is to examine how gender influences girls and boys tendency to utilize different coping techniques.

Gender differences and coping. In regards to gender, various studies have found that girls and boys use different coping strategies (Kort-Bulter 2009). Generally, girls rely on relational and approach techniques, whereas boys often use aggression and distancing techniques (Yuksel-Sahin 2015). Other studies note that girls rely primarily on avoidance techniques and internalizing their stress and boys use approach techniques in which they confront their stressor (see Kort-Bulter 2009). Though various studies suggest different coping techniques are used primarily by girls or boys, one commonality persists; coping strategies are likely influenced by gender socialization. Girls are socialized to be expressive and value relationships (Gilligan 1982; Lorber 1994), therefore they may resort to communicating their hardships by seeking social support (an approach strategy). Boys, on the other hand, have been socialized to control their emotions and embody masculine traits, such as physical strength and independence (Lorber 1994). It is therefore not surprising that boys may utilize aggression as a means of coping with bullying.

The same coping techniques may have different outcomes for girls and boys. For instance, Salmivalli and colleagues (1996) in Finland found that boy victims who displayed counter-aggression were more likely to encourage future incidences of bullying, whereas girls faced the same misfortune if they displayed helplessness *and* counter-aggression (see also Cowie and Berdondini 2002). Meanwhile, girls and boys were almost equally likely to encourage future incidences of bullying if they responded nonchalantly to initial attacks (Salmivalli et al. 1996).

Adaptations of the approach/avoidance model have been utilized to determine how children and adolescents respond to academic, medical, social, and interpersonal stressors (for complete findings see Fields and Prinz 1997), however few studies have focused exclusively on how gender influences how girls and boys respond to bullying. Since there is evidence to suggest that a child's coping techniques may exacerbate or dissuade future incidences of bullying, examining what strategies children use may offer insight for parents and educators who routinely interact with children. Furthermore, given that girls and boys often rely on different strategies, one must consider the gendered differences not only influences how children experience bullying, but also how they respond to bullying. The research questions for this study are: 1.) Do girls and boys use different coping strategies? and 2.) If differences exist, how are these coping strategies influenced by gender? Examining what children felt helped the most when they were victimized will shed light on what strategies girls and boys use, as well as the outcomes of these strategies.

Data and Methods

To answer these questions, I utilized data from the Youth Voice Project, which is a national survey aimed to examine how grade school children experience bullying (Davis and Nixon 2014). Thirty-one schools in 12 states participated in the study (N=13,177). Students in elementary school (5th grade, 10%), middle school (grades 6th-8th, 57%), and high school (grades 9th-12th, 33%) made up the sample. Schools are recruited through word-of-mouth and flyers. Participating schools were granted access to the on-line survey, via SurveyMonkey. The on-line survey consisted of 33 closed-questions and 12 open-ended questions and teachers were present while students took the survey, in case any technological problems surfaced (for a complete description of the survey, see Davis and Nixon 2014).

Sampling Criteria and Characteristics

Examining the full dataset was beyond the scope for this study. Therefore, I limited my sample to include respondents who fit my sampling criteria. Middle school students often report the highest rates of peer victimization, therefore their accounts were the focus of this study. Participants who satisfied Olweus's (1993) definition of bullying were included in this sample. To determine this, respondents that answered "every day," "once a week," or "two or three times a week" to at least one of the two following questions were included in this study:

> Q29. In the past month, how often have students at your school hurt you emotionally or excluded you?

> Q30. In the past month, how often have students at your school threatened to hurt you or hurt you physically?

Additionally, my sample was composed of respondents who offered a written response to the open-ended questions that related to coping techniques. The preceding close-ended question asked respondents to mark on a Likert scale how they responded to being bullied (see Appendix C):

> Q55: Did you do any of these things about what was done to you? What helped? Please click one option for each action.

Directly following this question were two open-ended questions:

> Q56: Overall, what did you do that helped the most?
>
> Q57: What happened when you did that?

Respondents who offered a response for both questions were included in this sample. This enabled me to examine not only what respondents thought was most helpful, but also the result of such actions. My sample consisted of respondents who answered both questions pertaining to what coping technique helped the most (Q56 & Q57), respondents who were in middle school, and those who fit Olweus' definition of bullying. Once this criterion was satisfied, the sample consisted of 649 girls and 583 boys.

Of the sample, most respondents were 12 years old (girls=36.7% and boys=35.5%). Approximately 31% of girls and boys were in either 6^{th} or 8^{th} grade, and roughly 36% of girls and boys were in 7^{th} grade. Racially, the sample was almost split evenly by whites and nonwhites. The sample is composed of approximately 43% of nonwhite girls, 56% white girls, and 50% nonwhite boys and 50% white boys (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Middle School Girls and Boys (Percentages in Parentheses are for All Counts)

	Girl (n=649)	Boys (n=583)
Age		
11 or younger	145 (22.3%)	117 (20.1%)
12	238 (36.7%)	207 (35.5%)
13	212 (32.7%)	190 (32.6%)
14	43 (6.6%)	56 (9.6%)
15	0	4 (0.7%)
16	1 (0.2%)	0
17	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.3%)
18	1 (0.2%)	0
19	0	2 (0.3%)
Missing	8 (1.2%)	5 (0.9%)
Grade		
6th Grade	205 (31.5%)	182 (31.2%)
7th Grade	238 (36.7%)	212 (36.4%)
8th Grade	206 (31.8%)	189 (32.4%)
Racial Breakdown		
Native American	20 (3.1%)	24 (4.1%)
African-American	47 (7.2%)	37 (6.3%)
Hispanic-American	48 (7.4%)	42 (7.2%)
Native Hawaiian	1 (0.2%)	0
Pacific Islander	3 (0.5%)	4 (0.7%)
White	368 (56.7%)	294 (50.4%)
Asian-American	21 (3.2%)	30 (5.1%)
Multi-racial	48 (7.4%)	42 (7.2%)
Other	46 (7.1%)	39 (6.7%)
Prefer not to answer	39 (6%)	59 (10.1%)
Missing	8 (1.2%)	12 (2.1%)
TOTAL	649 (100%)	583 (100%)

Analytic Strategy

To analyze the data, I conducted a qualitative content analysis. This required me to first identify and count themes, as relevant based on the literature. A total of four coping strategies were identified, which mirrored existing child coping items pertaining to the avoidance/approach model. Key words for each coping strategy were completed

(see Table 2) as well as the percentage breakdown for each theme (see Table 3). Next, I read through the data and categorized all responses within the four coping strategies identified. Lastly, I interpreted the underlying meaning of these counts (Graneheim and Lundman 2004; Krippendorff 2013; Morgan 1993). This enabled me to identify commonalities of how girls and boys coped with being mistreated, as well as subjectively interpreting these themes to identify how gender shaped one's response to being mistreated.

Findings

After analysis, five different coping strategies emerged from the data, four of which fit within the approach/avoidance model. Avoidance techniques included distancing (i.e. "walking away" or "ignoring" the situation) and externalizing (i.e. children who "stood up" or "fought back"). Approach techniques included seeking social support or problem solving. Lastly, humor was a coping technique used by respondents. Since there is not widespread agreement within the literature as to whether humor is an avoidance or approach technique, "humor" as a coping strategy stands alone in this analysis. Key words for each coping strategy were counted with the exception of problem solving[2] (see Table 4.2), followed by an analysis of the underlying meaning of these initial counts. Counts and percentages of different coping techniques used by girls and boys is presented in Table 4.3. Some responses described more than one coping strategy; such accounts were counted separately for each strategy.

[2] Given the nature of responses that comprised this theme, individual key words could not be identified. Instead, the numbers presented in the table reflect individual accounts, *not* key words.

Table 4.2: Key Word Counts of Coping Strategies Used by Girls and Boys

	Girls (n=649)		Boys (n=583)	
	Q57 "Overall, what did you do that helped the most?"	Q56 "What happened when you did that?"	Q57 "Overall, what did you do that helped the most?"	Q56 "What happened when you did that?"
AVOIDANCE TECHNIQUES				
Distancing Responses				
"walk away"	10	0	18	1
"Ignore"	72	12	70	3
Externalizing				
"stood up"	1	0	1	1
"fight"	9	5	11	3
Subtotal	92	17	100	8
APPROACH TECHNIQUES				
Seeking Social Support				
"parent"	25	7	20	2
"mom"	35	8	6	1
"dad"	8	1	4	1
"friend"	102	33	35	10
"teacher"	32	8	19	7
"adult"	21	6	23	0
Problem Solving[3]	73	-	44	-
Subtotal	296	63	151	21
HUMOR				
"Joke" or "joking"	15	4	40	1

[3] Given the nature of responses which comprised this theme, individual key words could not be identified. Instead, the numbers presented reflect individual accounts, *not* key words.

Table 4.3: Counts and Percentages of Coping Techniques Used by Girls and Boys

	Girls (n=649)	Boys (n=583)
Avoidance Techniques		
Distancing	82 (12.6%)	88 (15%)
Externalizing	10 (1.5%)	12 (2.0%)
Subtotal	92 (14.2%)	100 (17.2%)
Approach Techniques		
Seeking Social Support	223 (34.3%)	107 (18.4%)
Problem Solving	73 (11.2%)	44 (7.5%)
Subtotal	296 (45.6%)	151 (25.9%)
Humor	15 (2.3%)	40 (6.9%)

Avoidance Techniques

Distancing and externalizing were two avoidance techniques that arose from the data. While some studies suggest that girls utilize distancing strategies more than boys (see Kort-Bulter 2009), in this study boys (15%) reported slightly higher rates than girls (12%). Respondents who directed their emotions to their aggressor were considered to be using an externalizing strategy. Boys (2%) reported a slightly higher rate of externalizing strategies compared to girls (1.5%), which aligns with the literature (Kort-Bulter 2009; Yuksel-Sahin 2015).

Distancing. Respondents who used distancing strategies reported that they "walked away" or "ignored" their aggressor. These responses were passive and suggest cognitive distancing, because respondents attempted to ignore their situation (see Causey and Dubow 1992; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner 2002). For instance, a white girl in 8th grade described how she responded to her situation of being bullied by a peer; "over time I just decided not to care and act as if nothing didn't wich helped because she [the bully]

didn't get any of my energy and she just eventually stoped doing it afer 6 months" but that as a result, "…she just kept on trying to bother me." It is evident that this girl's experience fits Olweus' (1994) definition of bullying, since she was repeatedly targeted over time. However, ignoring her aggressor did not have the desired effect since the aggressor kept attempting to "bother" the girl. An African American girl in 7th grade reports a similar outcome, when "I ignored them and walked away like nothing every happened." As a result, "they [her bullies] got made because they weren't getting any attention." For both girls, ignoring their bullying only exacerbated the situation since the bully was not getting the response she/he intended. While these girls perceived their aggressors as not being satisfied with their passive responses, Wilton and colleagues (2002) assert that a bully's expectations *are* satisfied when their targets use passive coping techniques. Therefore, such responses are likely to instigate future attacks.

Similarly, a Hispanic American girl in 7th grade explained that when she attempted to ignore her bully, "…it only helped a little bit" and she "…[kept] on getting called names by that boy." Children who are routinely victimized by their peers may resort to passive coping techniques because they lack the social skills to confront their bully (see Ringrose and Renold 2010). Therefore, what may appear as a cognizant choice to walk away or ignore an aggressive situation may in fact be the child's only option if they do not have adaptive skills to confront their aggressor in a proactive way.

Respondents' attempts to distance themselves from feeling victimized is further illustrated in narratives that report "pretending" or "acting" that they weren't bothered by their aggressor. A Pacific Islander in 8th grade explained that her aggressor "stopped" when she "just walked away and acted like I didn't care." This resonates also with a

white girl in 7th grade who "…pretended it didn't bother me." While it is unknown what the long-term effects of this response were for these girls, generally passive coping techniques reinforce bullies and contribute to the cycle of victimization (Olweus 1994; Wilton et al. 2000). Overall, girls who reported ignoring, walking away, or pretending they weren't bothered did not have positive outcomes; their aggressor kept targeting them.

Boys who utilized avoidance coping strategies reported positive and negative outcomes. A white boy in 8th grade explains that what helped the most when he was bullied was to, "Walk away, things could have gotten worse if i stayed" and as a result, "I told a friend [*sic*] and felt better." By avoiding further confrontation by leaving the situation and relying on friends, this boy's use of avoidance and social support had a desire effect. Indeed, had he confronted his bully with counter-aggression, the situation would have likely escalated (see Salmivalli et al. 1996). Another white boy in 8th grade explains that his aggressors "stopped" when he "Ignored them or tried to get back at them." Here, the boy reflects on using two avoidance techniques, distancing and externalizing, which helped stop the unwanted behavior. However, it is unclear whether the avoidance or approach strategy was more influential in getting the aggressors to stop.

Other boys who used avoidance strategies did not have as positive outcomes. An African American boy in 7th grade wrote that when he, "tried not to worry about it," "they were herasing me even more." Similarly, an African American boy in 6th grade wrote that "it kept happening" when he "inorge him and walked away". Aligning with the literature, the use of passive coping techniques exacerbated the situation and brought on future attacks. However, some boys who ignored their aggressor may have been

embodying masculine norms of putting up a tough front. A Hispanic American boy in 7th grade conveys a desire to assert himself, despite his initial passive response to the situation. When asked what helped the most he wrote, "To ignore them and know that i am the better by not saying ant thing." As a result, "I just keep doing it keep track on what I am doing and not what they are doing." Here the boy clearly states that he shifted his focus to himself, not his aggressors.

Externalizing. Children who confronted their stressors by verbally ("stood up") or physically standing up to their attacker ("fight") composed the theme counter-aggression. Aligning with the literature, slightly more boys (2%) responded with physical aggression compared to girls (1.5%). Counter-aggression is used when a victim of bullying copes by directing their frustration to someone else, speaking up to the aggressor or calling them names, or physically attacks the bully (Salmivalli et al. 1996). Initially, externalizing strategies require the victim to confront their bully, however these strategies are classified as an avoidance technique because such reactions are indicators of emotional insecurities.

Girls who used externalizing strategies are captured in the following accounts. A white girl in 8th grade responded that when she "fought back. Defended myself," "they said they were sorry." A multi-racial girl in 8th grade said that her bully "…eventually stopped" when she "argued back." A white girl in 8th grade wrote, "I fought back using offensive words," and as a result "They shut their mouth and walked away and now they are my friends." While she admits participating in relational aggression, this girl was able to remedy the situation and then became friends with the girl. Though not a prominent

response by girls, approach techniques that were aggressive suggest that girls are capable of asserting themselves with words when bullies confront them.

Both girls and boys used externalizing strategies. However, girls primarily used verbal forms ("stood up" or "yelled back") and boys often used physical forms ("hit" or "fought back") of externalizing strategies. As explained by a white boy in 6th grade, the thing that helped the most was, "When I fought back and kicked his butt," which resulted in, "He fell, left me alone and had a couple bruises the next day." Responding with aggression had a desired effect, in that the bully left him alone. Noting the physical evidence of his attacks on, in addition to already "kick[ing] his butt," this boy exhibits an outward display of masculinity.

Two 8th graders who identified as multi-racial responded with outward displays of aggression and noted how such behavior was an emotional release for them. These accounts solidify the notion that externalizing strategies are emotion focused and therefore a type of avoidance. One boy explained that "thengs got a little better" when he "hit them or faught them." This boys then explains why he resorted to violence by clarifying "i held all the feelings in untill it became puer anger." The second boy stated that by fighting back, "It helped me to release a lot of anger. I hurt the other person." Such accounts reflect stereotypical displays of masculinity since the boys admit to releasing their anger by using physical force and intending to hurt or intimidate their aggressor to warrant off future attacks. However, responding to stressors by externalizing their emotions is generally considered a maladaptive approach, since the behavior does not remedy the cause of the mistreatment and may actually increase the likelihood of future victimization (Olweus 1994; Wilton et al. 2000).

In general, girls and boys reported similar rates of using distancing or externalizing as an avoidance coping strategy. A gender distinction is that more girls reported that they "stood up" or verbally confronted their aggressor, whereas boys reported using physical force more. This aligns with the literature, which outlines that girls are more likely to partake in relational aggression and boys partake in physical aggression (Olweus 1993; Simmons 2002). While such strategies may have helped some respondents, overall, ignoring or confronting their stressor was not especially helpful in helping students. Students who use avoidance techniques may lack social skills that allow them to adequately confront their stressor. Repeated use of avoidance strategies may also decrease the likelihood of the victim gaining pro-social skills, which would allow them to confront their stressor in adaptive ways. Therefore, students who use avoidance coping strategies are likely to be victimized again.

Approach Techniques

Respondents who reported seeking social support or attempting to solve their problem are considered to have used approach techniques. More girls (35.9%) reported that seeking social support helped them the most when they were bullied, compared to boys (18.4%). More girls (11.2%) also reported problem solving strategies as being most effective, in comparison to boys (7.5%). This conflicts with some previous studies, in which boys are reported to use approach techniques more than girls (Kort-Bulter 2009; Yuksel-Sahin 2015).

Seeking social support. Another approach oriented coping technique includes girls and boys seeking support from adults or their peers. Girls relied on their friends and mothers overwhelmingly. In the following account, this girl describes the insidious nature of her friendships, "I took advice from my friends, they told me to try to ignore them, and tell them to stop. They also said that they would tlak to the person about what was going on." As a result, the girl explained, "The ignoring part of the situation didn't really work, cause I cant ignore one of my good friends that is mad at me for no good reason. They talked to him/her and they told me what really didn't. I was happy about the conclusion, but I still have one good friend, angry at me for no reason what so ever." Such accounts are reflected in the literature (see Simmons 2002), which shed light on the frequency of relational aggression experienced by girls within their friendships. In other words, friendships for many girls are breeding grounds for relational aggression. As a result, it is especially difficult for many girls to escape or ignore their aggressor since the aggressor is enmeshed within their friendships.

Other girls noted the important role that their mother played. A white girl explained, "I told my mother and she said that I was beautiful the way I was, and then she said that if the mean girl was saying I was ugly, the mean girl was calling my whole family ugly, and that no one will like her if she keeps saying untrue things. My mom was right." As a result, she further explained, "My mom has always been so supportive, and so when the incident didn't I knew to tell my mom." Likewise, another girl explained, "I told my parents abou tit and they told me it was just some kid that is trying to act cool." Various studies have examined the role of family characteristics and bullying behavior and have found that peer aggression is related to low family cohesion in which

relationships with both mother and father are weak (Bowers, Smith, and Binney 1992; Flouri et al. 2003; Olweus 1993; Rigby, 1993, 1994). Specifically though, mother's involvement with their daughters is more prevalent than father's involvement with their sons (Gold and Yanof 1985; Flouri et al. 2003).

Some boys reflected on how their parents played a vital role in coping with being mistreated. A white boy in 6th grade wrote, "I spoke to my mom. She gave me confidence to let myself think this is just a phase. That things will pass and get better" and as a result, "I felt more confident and relied on what she said. Things did actually start to get better." Talking with and getting support from his mom had a positive effect. Not only was this boy satisfied with his actions, the bullying stopped as a result of drawing support from his mom and building his confidence.

Peers also played an important role for boys. The most helpful thing a white boy in 7th grade did in response to being bullied was, "I just hung out with my friends that actually accepted me for who I am and not for how I act.(gay)." As a sexual minority, this boy is undeniably at greater risk of being bullied than this heterosexual peers. By aligning himself with peers that accept him and his sexual orientation, "It made me feel better knowing that my friends still liked me." Having a support system that considered this boy a friend, despite the apparent stigma he faced, played an important role in how he coped with bullying.

A white boy in 6th grade explained that relying on his friends was the only response he found helpful. When mistreated, this boy explained that what helped the most was "telling a friend. It kind of released some stress," and as a result, "I felt better. At least I was away from the people who made fun of me!" While surrounding himself

with supportive friends had a positive outcome, it may have been the only foreseeable response for this boy. Friends appear to be the first social group that many children seek support from, which suggests that peers hold more power than adults might be aware of. Also noteworthy, was the tendency for girls (15.7%) to specify they sought support from their "friends" compared to boys (6%).

Problem solving. Children who use problem solving as an approach coping technique often report trying to understand what happened to them, try to ensure the situation wouldn't occur again, or changing something so things would work out, composed the strategy of problem solving (see also Cause and Dubow 1992). Within this study, participants were using problem solving as an approach technique if they explained that they tried to solve the problem by talking directly with their bully, changed their own attitude, outlook, or behavior regarding the situation, took up various activities to help pacify any frustration they felt, or considering the point of view of their aggressor. For instance, one girl explains, "I created a new way to deal with thinks, like a total didn't identity, where I am not vunerable toanything anymore. My emotions are in my complete control." As a result, "They [peers] began to repect me greatly." This girl's ability to control her attitude and emotions hints at a form of stoic resiliency, which is a form of adaption.

Another girl considers the motives of her attackers and reports, "I thought that if someone was picking on me that they really had problems and that I should not believe it at all." With this attitude she explains, "I got better and felt more confident." Such a response offers insight in understanding how other girls might take a moment of hostility

and turn it into an opportunity to gain confidence. Also, by considering the assistant's motives, victims of bullying might be more apt to use adaptive approach techniques, such as problem solving, that may dissuade future attacks (Wilton et al. 2000).

Not only did current friends play a crucial role in how some girls coped with being mistreated, but there were reports of wanting to talk to their attacker, in hopes of defending themselves, understanding why they were attacked, and/or possibly forming a friendship. One girl explained that as a response to being bullied, "I just apologized to that person." As a result, "That person said that they were sorry too and we became friends."

In addition to relying on friends, some girls reported using alternative means to cope with being bullied. At first glance, some of these accounts appear as avoidance strategies, since the girls did not directly confront their aggressor. However, by redirecting their attention to other activities and thoughts, these girls attempted to solve their problem, not avoid it. A white girl in 7th explains that what helped the most was when "I wrote about it and thought about how many friends were still there for me and realized that nothing had really changed. I had my friends and they were there for me. My friends and writing." As a result of writing and being aware of her support system, she further explained, "I just focused on schoolwork, my friends, my writing, and my life. I let go of what happened." By redirecting her attention to school and friends, this girl's use of an approach technique was adaptive since her response did not encourage more attacks from her aggressor. Also, this coping technique not only helps elevate feeling like a victim, it fosters richer friendships and commitment to academic life. In fact, problem

solving is “associated with the de-escalation and resolution of bullying” (Wilton et al. 2000:242).

Boys who used two distinct problem solving strategies; they either considered the motives of the bully or they considered themselves “better than” the bully. For instance, in response to his experience of being bullied, a white 7th grader wrote, “tell people and remind myself that they are insecure bullies that pick and threaten kids to make them feel better about themselves. it has helped me a little more than usual,” and that “i remind myself that every time something happens to me.” By considering the motives of bullies, this boy’s opinion was one of sympathy (or possibly pity?), not hatred towards his bullies. Keeping in mind that bullies’ actions are means to assert control, allowed this particular boy to realize that he was merely a pawn in the bullies’ attempts to feel powerful. Similarly, a white boy in 8th grade “felt better” when he responded to his bullies; “Reminded myself that they were jerks and it didn't bother me anymore.” This is also reflective of cognitive coping strategies, since this student reframed their thinking about the situation.

A Native American boy in 6th grade reasoned that it was not his fault for being targeted; “knowing it's not my fault and they could have a family problem and want to take it on someone else.” By reframing his perception of the situation, this boy explained that he “…felt better the next day.,” Other boys considered their own strengthens and ultimately considered themselves being better than their bully. A white boy in 8th grade “felt better” when he “Reminded myself that I will be more successful than them in the future.” Similar accounts suggest that boys who considered themselves “better” than the bully or considered the motives of the bully, were able to walk away from their incident

without feeling hurt. In other words, these boys "shrugged off" the advances of bullies by framing the bullies' behavior as lesser than their own. However the tone of such responses suggest boys' attempts to embody masculine traits that call upon strengthen, control, and are void of outward displays of empathy. Problem solving techniques used by boys included redirecting their attention elsewhere. A white boy in 6th grade explained he felt relaxed when he responds to bullying by "swimming, play with my dog and cat." Similarly, an Asian American boy in 6th grade reported "I felt calm" when "I read a book". Redirecting their attention to other activities had positive effects for some boys.

While both girls and boys reported using approach coping techniques, girls reported seeking social support and problem solving more than boys. Girls in particular reported relying on their peers and mothers. Though boys relied on their friends, they did not overwhelmingly report seeking support from their fathers. Similarly, while both used problem solving skills, girls attempted to understand the motives of their bully, befriend them, or shift their attention to more healthy avenues. Boys however, used problem solving skills to reframe their thinking about their stressor and concluding they were "better" than their bully.

Humor

Humor was used by 2.3% of girls and 6.9% of boys, which was reflected in responses that reported "joking" about their situation. As explained by Klein and Kuiper (2006:390), humor is "…one of the important social competencies that develops during middle childhood" (see also Martin et al. 2003; Huuki et al. 2010). Humor can be used to improve one's relationships, heighten group moral, or alienate others (Martin et al. 2003).

Martin and colleagues (2003) have distinguished four types of humor, two of which are adaptive and two are maladaptive. In short, self-enhancing humor is used to better one's self without being detrimental to others, whereas aggressive humor is harmful to one's relationships with others (Martin et al. 2003). Humor that is self-accepting and enhances a person's relationships with others is considered affiliative humor. Humor that is at the expense and damage to the self is self-defeating humor (Martin et al. 2003). Given the array of uses humor can serve in promoting or harming the self and social relationships, this theme does not clearly align with approach or avoidance coping strategies. Furthermore, since the tone and intent of respondent's use of "making a joke" was not adequately conveyed in the open ended responses, this further complicates the ability to discern if the use of humor was an adaptive or maladaptive technique used by children.

For instance, an African American girl in 7th grade explained that what helped the most when she was bullied, was "making a joke out of it." As a result, "things started to stop a little but they still joked about it even more." The benefits of making a joke about the situation were short-lived, and ultimately this coping technique only served to intensify the behavior. Generally, however, such strategies were successful for girls. A white girl in 8th grade explained that "they [her bullies] joked along and it does not bother me anymore" after she responded to the incident by "not let it bother me, just blow it off, made a joke." Similarly, a white girl in 6th grade had a similar experience when she "Let it roll off my back and make a joke about it." As a result, "I felt better." Another girl explained "I talked to my friend's and I also made jokes about it." As a result of joking and relying on her peers, the girl wrote, "It helped me a lot because they figured out that I

was not going to put up with it anymore!!" By utilizing humor and an approach strategy, this girl was able to cope with her situation.

Of the boys who "made a joke" about the situation, many reported that as a result, "I felt better," "I felt a lot better about the situation," "we [peers] all laughed," or "things didn't change." A white boy in 8th grade specified, "If I was laughed at i would laugh along to ease the pain in me," and as result, "they eased up a little bit on the bully[ing]." While laughing off the situation helped "ease" some of the discomfort or hurt, laughing along with peers may be a "safe" way for shy boys to respond to confrontational situations with aggressors which reflects self-defeating humor (see Martin et al. 2003).

Similarly, a white boy in 7th grade explained that although humor was initially used as a response to the bullying he experienced, it did not have the desired result; "I made a joke about it and then they started laughing... I laughed too and then we just joked around and hung out... But that lasted for only a few days." As a result, "They became friends for only a few days. BUT, they stopped teasing me about one thing and teased me about other small things."

While humor was used by both girls and boys, boys overwhelmingly reported that "making a joke" was the most helpful thing they did, when responding to being bullied. However, the tone, intent, and context of the situation is indiscernible. It is therefore unclear as to whether the humor used was self-defeating or self-affirming. Regardless, boys overwhelmingly reported that using humor was the most helpful thing for them. This warrants further investigation to discern the intent and overall outcome of using humor as a coping strategy for boys.

Discussion

While both girls and boys used avoidance and approach coping strategies, as well as humor, my analysis reveals gendered differences in how middle school children cope with bullying. Respondents' descriptions of what worked best and what happened as a result offer insight into the intent and outcome of various coping techniques used. While there were mixed reviews as to whether the use of approach or avoidance techniques or humor worked best for children, general commonalities surfaced. Overwhelming, more girls sought social support whereas more boys relied on humor to diffuse situations of bullying, while avoidance techniques used by girls and boys did not generally help alleviate the situation.

Seeking social support is often recognized as an adaptive coping technique, however the gender differences in how girls and boys rely on sources of support have previously not been thoroughly investigated. This study found that girls used this approach coping strategy more than boys and they specifically sought out the support from peers and their mothers. Girls are socialized to identify with the caring and nurturing qualities of their mother, as well as strongly value relationships (Gilligan 1982; Simmons 2002). Friendships for girls are often very intimate in comparison to boys, since boys are socialized to separate from their mothers and embody masculine traits that reflect independence and emotional restraint (Gilligan 1982; Lorber 1994; Johnson 1997; Simmons 2002). However, girls who often rely on their friends for support may have dire consequences, since "the relationship itself is often the weapon with which girls' battles are fought" (Simmons 2002:31; see also Dellasega and Nixon 2003). Girls value

relationships and fear isolation and may therefore remain in abusive relationships since the alternative of being alone is perceived as far worse (Simmons 2002). Given the influential role that mother's play in girls' social development, mothers may capitalize on this role to further instill confidence, compassion, and resilience within their daughters. It is noteworthy to consider the role of motherhood for different racial and ethnic groups (see Collins 1990).

Boys too relied on peers and adults for support, however more prominent was their use of humor to diffuse situations of peer aggression. Data for this study were limited to the written responses offered by boys, therefore the tone, implications, and intent of using humor was not discernable. Generally, humor plays a pivotal role in boys' socialization and is categorized as a resource that boys can use to boost their status (Huuki et al. 2010). Humor is therefore recognized as a strategy boys use to achieve and maintain culturally appropriate forms of masculinity (Huuki et al. 2010). However, boys who lack the social skills to cope with bullying in adaptive ways may rely on humor to convey a sense of status and control. Therefore, what may first appear as boys enacting masculine traits by using humor, may instead be reflective of boys negotiating multiple masculinities. Connell's (1996:210) term "layering" explains how "'on the surface' boys may appear to be displaying a seamless, coherent and consistent 'masculinity' when 'underneath' they are involved in an on-going struggle to negotiate classroom and playground hierarchies" (Renold 2001:381). Examining the nuances of how humor is used by boys warrants more attention.

Limitations

The current study offered fruitful findings by focusing exclusively on the gendered differences of open-ended responses from middle school students, however this study is not without some shortcomings. Data for this study was limited to how much students chose to convey on the open-ended responses. Therefore students who did not have strong typing skills may have offered less information. Also, I was unable to probe respondents for more thorough answers, particularly concerning how they used humor and if girls and boys default to different coping techniques, depending on the type of bullying they experience (i.e. relational or physical aggression) and the sex of the bully. For instance, girls may respond differently to physical forms of aggression if they assailant is a boy or a girl. Similarly, boys may use different coping strategies if another boy hits them, or if a girl calls him names. Such nuances were indiscernible based on my data, however future studies should consider how the types of bullying and sex of victims and bullies influence the type of coping strategy used.

Findings from this study are exclusive to middle school girls and boys; therefore findings cannot be generalized to students in elementary and high school. While it was evident that girls rely greatly on their peers and mothers, future research might consider exploring perspectives from these social support systems. For instance, how do mothers respond when their daughters discuss their experiences of being bullied? What advice or guidance do mothers often give their daughters? Answers to such questions may offer more insight into the use of social support by girls.

While my sample was nearly split between nonwhites and whites, a more thorough analysis of racial differences and coping techniques could contribute to the

body of literature. There is evidence to suggest that parenting styles differ based on socio-economic status, racial, and ethnic background (Collins 1990; Lareau 2003). It is therefore likely that in addition to gender socialization influencing one's coping techniques, a child's SES, race, and ethnicity may affect how children respond to various stressors. Lastly, a longitudinal study could enable researchers to examine the long-term effects of using various coping strategies. Initially, confronting the stressor may pacify the situation, although research suggests that in the long term, externalizing strategies may cause more harm than good. Therefore, respondents in this study who reported that when they "stood up" or "fought back" "helped" the situation, more research is needed to uncover the long-term effects of such coping strategies.

Implications

The extent and frequency of bullying is contingent not only on bullies who instigate and perpetuate the behavior, but also on how victims respond to being bullied. Children who use adaptive coping techniques, such as seeking social support and problem solving, may likely deter future incidences of bullying from occurring. However, maladaptive techniques, such as avoidance or externalizing emotions, may exacerbate the situation and contribute to a cycle of victimization. To dissuade bullying behavior and help victims cope with bullying in adaptive ways, children should be encouraged and taught how to use approach coping strategies. Such lessons, however, should be gender specific.

Girls' reliance on their friends and mothers can be strengthened by ensuring that such support contributes to instilling pro-social characteristics, such as resiliency,

problem solving, and connectedness (see DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine 2011). By cultivating such characteristics, girls will likely not only be able to cope with bullying in an adaptive way, but future incidences of stressors may similarly be pacified. Boys too could benefit from forming healthy relationships with peers and parents. However working towards such a goal would require a drastic shift in gender socialization since boys are not socialized to value friendship or rely on their parents to the same degree that girls are (see Johnson 2005). A more reasonable approach to promoting boys' use of adaptive coping techniques would be to encourage resiliency through avenues that are already familiar to them, given their gender socialization. Boys who use self-affirming humor may likely dissuade future incidences of bullying and should therefore be taught how to avoid self-harming humor.

Given the benefits of approach coping techniques, boys would also benefit from learning how to re-conceptualize stressors in their lives, solve the problem on their own, or seek social support. However, such lessons should deter boys from reinforcing traditional masculine traits (i.e. independence, competition, and aggression). These traits may counteract the necessity of relying on peers and adults, having empathy, and being resilient (see DuBois et al. 2011). Educators and parents may likely cultivate pro-social behavior approach coping techniques for boys, by role modeling and mentoring (DuBois et al. 2011; Masten and Tellegen 2012). Considering how educators and parents can instill qualities in girls and boys that foster approach coping strategies offers great hope that not only might bullying decrease, but that children may embody pro-social characteristics that can extend across time and various situations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Bullying among children is a serious problem in American schools. Many researchers and educators have attempted to understand bullying behavior by examining characteristics of the bullies and victims involved. However, bullying can be better understood as the relationship between power and socialization. In other words, bullying behavior is a symptom of other social issues in our culture. By examining middle school student's descriptions of bullying, this study sheds light on how the larger institution of gender plays a pivotal role in bullying behavior.

Divided into three article-length chapters, this dissertation offered a sociological and feminist analysis of how middle school children experience, interpret, and cope with bullying. The first article examined how girls and boys experience different types of bullying. Next, the quantity and content of how and what girls and boys relayed was examined. The final article explores how, based on gender socialization, girls and boys relied on different coping techniques. Following, I offer a brief analysis of the overarching themes in the three empirical articles. Next, I outline implications at the micro, meso, and macro levels of analyses, followed by a brief discussion on some of the shortcomings and limitations of the study. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

Common Themes across the Empirical Chapters

While each empirical article can stand-alone, there are two salient themes that link the three articles together. The first theme addresses how bullying behavior is shaped by gender. Second, how children experience, interpret, and cope with bullying reinforces the gender binary. These themes contribute to the current body of literature on bullying research by offering a sociological and feminist analysis of the gendered differences of bullying behavior.

Bullying Behavior is Shaped by Gender

Children's behavior is shaped by gender (Lorber 1994) and their interactions with bullying are no exception. Previous literature cites the prevalence of boys defaulting to physical forms of aggression and girls primarily using relational aggression (Olweus 1993). This trend is confirmed in my findings from Chapter II. However, the reported rates were not drastically different, as previous studies have suggested. To explain how this difference is shaped by gender, we may consider looking at these trends through a sociological and feminist lens.

The reported rates of experiencing physical or relational aggression may not be accurate if children are attempting to conform to prescribed gender norms. What may be happening is that boys are underreporting incidences of physical aggression. Boys who are bullied would be breaking a gender norm if they reported the mistreatment, since they would be admitting they are a victim and not strong enough to stand up to the bully. On the other hand, boys who use overt forms of bullying are actually conforming to gender

norms that demand they be aggressive, independent, and in control. Similarly, overt forms of bullying might be over-reported by girls. Girls who use physical aggression against other girls (and boys) are breaking gender norms that demand they be non-violent and cooperative. As a result, victims may over-report these incidences, since the behavior is more noticeably wrong if the culprit is a girl. Meanwhile, girls may be under-reporting cases of relational aggression. Girls are socialized to be verbally expressive and value relationships (Coates 2004; Weatherall 2002). Friendships often become a breeding ground for relational aggression, thereby normalizing the tendency of girl friends to exclude or isolate each other (Simmons 2002). If friendships are commonplace for relational aggression, girls may not be necessarily "breaking" a gender norm and therefore the incidences go unreported.

These possible explanations reflect the influence of gender as a social institution, since children's behavior is working within a larger framework that governs how they act. Based on my data, it was not possible to clearly identify if gender expectations were causing some respondents to underreport or over-report their experiences. However, it is clear that students' responses were gendered.

Through socialization, girls are encouraged to express their emotions, describe their feelings, excel in writing, and value friendships (Coates 2004; Lorber 1994; Weatherall 2002). Boys, on the other hand, have been socialized to be less verbally and emotionally expressive and cultivate a strong sense of independence (Coates 2004; Johnson 2005; Lorber 1994). Findings from this study reflect these differences, as evident in how respondents wrote about their experiences of being bullied. As described in Chapter III, girls offered a higher quantity of responses. They also included more

descriptive details in their written accounts. Boys' responses were fewer and shorter compared to girls. Traditional gender norms influenced the verbosity offered by girls and the stoic silenced conveyed by boys.

Bullying Behavior Reinforces Gender Differences

The second overarching theme addresses how children's bullying behavior reinforces the gender binary, thereby supporting gender ranking. As a social institution, gender has the capacity to change since it is comprised of active agents and conflict often arises (Martin 2004). However, findings from the current study suggest that children's behavior overwhelmingly reinforces gender differences.

The gender binary is affirmed when students who do not readily conform to being strictly masculine or feminine are targeted by their peers. Boy's behavior is shaped by notions of hegemonic masculinity and therefore perpetuates gender differences by supporting a monolithic type of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Pascoe 2003; 2007). As discussed in Chapter II, some boys experienced gender harassment because they displayed traits or behaviors that did not align with traditional masculine norms (i.e. boys who cried or had a high pitched voice). Meanwhile, boys were confirming their own masculinity when they targeted other boys who were gender nonconformist. By targeting peers who did not embody masculine traits, the bullies were demonstrating control, aggression, and dominance. Furthermore, boys who touched girls inappropriately or called girls sexual slurs are using girls as objects to show their prowess, heterosexuality, and control (see Pascoe 2005).

Girls also reinforced the gender binary when they policed other girls who do not fully embody feminine traits and behavior. When girls targeted other girls because of their appearance, weight, or sexual behavior, they were supporting the notion that there is one way to be feminine. In other words, girls objectified and sexualized other girls by drawing attention to the target's appearance and real or perceived sexual activity.

In conclusion, girls' and boys' bullying experiences show that they believe there is only one way to be feminine or masculine when they target peers who break away from their "appropriate" gender norms. When the gender binary is supported, gender ranking is nearly inevitable. Not only do girls and boys monitor each other's gendered behavior, they stigmatize those who break away from the gender binary. Teasing, spreading rumors, and exclusion are therefore control mechanisms that are intended to influence the victim to conform to "appropriate" norms (see Schur 1983). Remedying the tendency for girls and boys to categorize traits and behaviors as exclusively feminine or masculine requires us to consider how the gender binary itself might be changed or eliminated.

Implications

To reduce incidences of bullying, I suggest we move towards a sociology of bullying. This will require us to see how society influences the individual. To accomplish this, we may begin by drawing our attention to the three levels of analysis often used by sociologists; the mirco, meso, and macro levels. Following, I offer salient implications that can be applied at each level of analysis.

Implications at the Micro-Level

The micro-level is the smallest level of analysis, focusing on the interactions in small groups such as within families, churches, neighborhoods, and schools. In light of my findings, I suggest that bullying behavior can be addressed by considering the micro-level interactions that occur in schools.

Grade school marks an important transition for children and adolescents. While family is often recognized as the primary agent of socialization, peers may actually have a greater influence during adolescence (Aseltine 2009). Schools are therefore another prominent agent of socialization during this period, since adolescents spend much of their time in schools. The manifest functions of schools are obvious, however schools also provide students with an array of unintended lessons. In addition to learning standard lessons in writing, math, and science, students indirectly learn responsibility, obedience to authority, and conformity to gender norms (Thorne 1997). Unfortunately for girls who are routinely called "fat" and boys who are teased for being "gay," school is less about education and more about negotiating a fearful terrain, in which their peers routinely bully them. Girls and boys who are frequently punched, slapped, or pushed in the hallways learn to view school as a battlefield, not an inclusive or safe environment that cultivates respect and academic success.

Teachers, staff, and administrators at schools should capitalize on their influential role and promote pro-social behavior. As explained by the Elton Report, "The message to heads and teachers is clear. It is they have the power, through their own efforts, to improve standards of work and behaviour and the life chances of their pupils" (Elton 1989:89). Adults working in schools have the ability to deter future incidences of

bullying by promoting a positive school climate, which does not tolerate bullying behavior. The school climate refers to "the quality and character of school life," including the expectations, norms, and values that influence how people in school feel (NSCC 2015; Graves and Fineran 2008). Research suggests that when compared to other schools, schools with a positive climate have higher student performance rates and lower rates of truancy, aggression, and violence (Berkowitz 2015; Graves and Fineran 2008; NSCC 2015). Similarly, students' perceived support from teachers, specifically regarding bullying, is an important aspect of deterring future incidences of aggression (Berkowitz 2015; Cowie and Olafsson 2000). Depending on the relationships with adults at school, students may reframe from defending victims if the students lack confidence in teachers (Sullivan 2011). Therefore, school personnel must consider how they are not only role models for students, but also how their attitudes and values shape the school climate.

If adults working in schools exude positive and pro-social values through their lessons and interactions (both with each other and students), the climate of the school will reflect this and incidences of aggression will be less likely to be tolerated. Students who reside on a gender spectrum, not the gender binary, would therefore be at less risk of gender harassment. Similarly, appearance based discrimination and sexual harassment would not be tolerated if school personnel were actively working to ensure their school is a safe and respectable environment (for resources on promoting a positive school climate, see NSCC 2015).

Educators may consider how girls' and boys' involvement with bullying is inherently gendered. It is too simplistic to summarize "boys use overt aggression and girls use covert aggression". Instead, teachers would benefit from conceptualizing how

students are working within the larger institution of gender. Many gender differences are reaffirmed and challenged in how girls and boys play in schools (Thorne 1997). Specifically, space and types of play are separated by sex, resulting in limited interaction between girls and boys (Thorne 1997). Sex-segregated play confirms and reinforces gender differences. To challenge the gender binary, teachers may consider how they can incorporate cooperative and supervised heterogeneous work and play groups (Thorne 1997). Achieving this may be as simple as eliminating the tendency to group students based on sex, organizing co-ed sports teams, making the school a safe place for gender nonconformists (i.e. having gender neutral bathrooms and mandating diversity training for teachers), and encouraging students to partake in non-traditional gendered activities (i.e. girls taking upper level math classes and boys taking creative writing classes). Increased interaction between girls and boys can enable students to work together, share responsibilities, and show respect for differences. As a result, incidences of sexual and gender harassment may decrease as heterogeneous play and work groups increase.

School-wide approaches to deterring bullying might consider promoting campaigns as "pro-belonging" instead of "anti-bullying" (Davis 2015). Focusing on a "pro-belonging" mentality may more accurately capture the overarching goals of educators who aim to foster pro-social behavior amongst their students. Shifting our perspective to focus on positive behavior may contribute to a different mindset; one that makes positive behavior the focus within schools, not wrongdoing behavior. This coincides with research on active bystanders and bullies. In exploring the effects of peer-helping interventions, Cowie and Sharp (1996) found that implementing peer-helping interventions in one school not only pacified immediate stressors, but that the school

climate also improved (see also Cowie and Olafsson 2000). However, many decisions that school administrators and teachers make are limited based on the influence of meso-level institutions.

Implications at the Meso-Level

The meso-level is considered the middle ground of analysis. This level of analysis focuses on groups that are larger than day-to-day interactions and smaller than nation wide influences. The meso-level includes national institutions (i.e. the national education system), national organizations (i.e. a political party), and entire communities.

In light of my findings, focusing on the education system may offer fruitful insight into considering how bullying might be stopped beyond interactions at the micro-level. The education system includes public schools from grades Kindergarten to 12th and is responsible for funding, policies, regulations, resources (i.e. supplies and technology), compensation, contracts, and administrative offices (state and district). These decisions are the responsibility of the state and local government, not individual schools (micro-level) or the nation (macro-level).

In an attempt to be "tough on crime", congress based the Gun-Free Schools Act 1994 (Kang-Brown et al. 2013). For states to qualify for federal educational funding, schools districts were required to expel any student for a year, if they brought a weapon to school (Kang-Brown et al. 2013). This contributed to the widespread use of zero-tolerance programs. Zero-tolerance programs are characterized by their "one strike" rule; any form of misconduct is grounds for expulsion or suspension (Graves and Fineran

2008; Kang-Brown et al. 2013). Between 1996-1997, 79% of schools (imposed by school districts) adopted a zero-tolerance policy (Kang-Brown et al. 2013).

Despite its widespread implementation, zero-tolerance polices have been found to be counterproductive and researchers urge schools to instead adapt values that reflect restorative justice (Graves and Fineran 2008). Rather than suspending or expelling students who misbehave, school climates are positively influenced if wrongdoings are addressed with respect, all parties are involved (i.e. the student, school, parents, community, and law enforcement), and the culprit is integrated back into the community (Graves and Fineran 2008; Heydenberk, Heydenberk, and Tzenova 2006). At the state level, the education school system may consider appointing restorative justice policies for all schools to follow. Within this framework, the meso-level (education system) has the ability to directly influence the micro-level (individual schools). Policies implemented from the education system could enable educators to "punish in private and praise in public" (Davis 2015). Implementing "pro-belonging" campaigns would enable girls and boys to safely act outside of traditional gender roles, thereby working to dismantle gender ranking. Also, since many bullies are also victims, the cycle of victimization for bully/victims could be deterred if they were reintegrated back into their school community.

While micro-level interactions are important to examine, large-scale change is not likely unless we consider how larger institutions, such the education system, influence the continuance of bullying. Schools that adapt restorative justice values may also contribute to creating a positive school climate, in which bullying behavior is not tolerated. Advocates for implementing restorative justice in schools note the importance of holding

students accountable for their actions by offering support by reintegrating them back into the school community (Morrison 2002). Under this framework, bullies and victims would process the wrongdoing together. Processing the situation would enable the bullies to understand their behavior is wrong, while simultaneously receiving support and respect from the victims and the rest of the community (Morrison 2002). As a result, victims would learn adaptive ways to cope and bullies would be integrated back into the school culture. Strengthening their relationships and personal investment in school would help eliminate any behaviors (i.e. bullying) that would compromise their sense of belong. If the education system mandated the implementation of restorative justice approaches to bullying and aggression in schools, rates of bullying would likely diminish, while resiliency and respect would flourish (see Morrison 2002).

Implications at the Macro-Level

As the largest level of analysis, macro-level sociologists study society as a whole, entire nations, and the global community. At first glance, it may appear that bullying can be readily remedied by focusing attention on the mirco and meso levels. However, policies and bills passed at the national level have the capability of influencing greater society. Efforts made at the micro and meso-levels are essentially attempting to change American culture so that diversity, inclusiveness, and respect are strengthened in schools. To create change however, "cultural shifts require proactive interventions" (Morrison 2002:3). Changes at the macro-level have the ability to trickle down to the meso and micro-levels.

For instance, government grants may help organizations and institutions at the meso-levels who are working to remedy bullying in their schools. One salient way that some organizations are attempting to promote pro-social skills amongst their students is the implementation of mentoring programs (such as Big Brothers Big Sisters). Previous studies have found that students who participate in mentoring programs have gained positive attributes in the youth's academic, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes (DuBois et al. 2011; Larose et al. 2015; Rhodes 2005). Relationships formed between mentors and mentees have strengthened the mentee's self-worth, academic achievement, and social skills (Karcher et al. 2010; Rhodes and Lowe 2009) and decreased rates of substance abuse (Rhodes, Reddy, and Grossman 2005). Given the long-term benefits of mentor programs (see DuBois et al. 2011), schools would benefit if the government offered more opportunities to receive substantial grants to help fund these efforts. If funded by multi-million dollar grants, school districts would be able to implement mentor programs in their schools.

As stated previously, researchers do not readily agree on one definition of bullying and as a result, reported rates and frequencies of bullying are not consistent (Finkelhor et al. 2011). Examining how the term 'bullying' is used to describe various behaviors warrants further investigation. This would require researchers and educators to discern if there is a difference between how bullying, peer aggression, peer mistreatment, and peer victimization are categorized. Additionally, examining how the terms "bully" and "victim" reflect a fixed mindset might move researchers and educators away from labeling and redirect their efforts to focus on the behavior. Reaching a consensus on defining inappropriate behavior is especially imperative, given the rise of cyberbulling,

sexting, and revenge porn which warrant legal intervention (see Hinduja and Patchin 2010).

Adopting a sociology of bullying approach will enable educators, parents, students, and schools to consider the multiple factors that influence and enable bullying behavior. Similarly, through this lens, we may consider various steps to decrease incidences of bullying and advance pro-social behavior. At the micro-level, promoting healthy school climates may be one salient way that children learn to appreciate diversity, gain self-confidence, and self-efficacy, and thereby minimizing the tolerance for bullying and strengthening their coping techniques. At the meso-level, the education system can consider how restorative justice might be implemented in school districts, thereby fostering respect and reintegration for children involved in bullying. Lastly, large-scale change is possible if the government offers grants to help fund mentoring programs in schools and a uniform definition of bullying is established.

Limitations

Though this study offered useful contributions for educators, it is not without its shortcomings. The Youth Voice Project is the first large-scale national survey to examine how young people experience bullying. However, there are some limitations to using a secondary dataset. For instance, it is unclear if some of the participating schools already had an anti-bullying campaign or intervention established in their school. Bullying may increase in the short term, after awareness is raised in schools (Cowie and Olafsson 2000). Once awareness is raised, incidences of bullying might be over-reported since

children and educators are looking for such behavior, whereas prior to the awareness, such cases might have been overlooked. Therefore, having a concrete understanding on which schools had already implemented anti-bullying campaigns is important to adequately consider the perceived and reported rates of bullying. Such campaigns should be tailored for specific at-risk groups of children, such as gender nonconformists and sexual minorities.

Teachers administered the survey to consenting students and were available if any technical questions arose. However the level of computer skills, writing abilities, and familiarity of the English language (the survey was only offered in English) could have influenced how much the students were able to share on the open-ended questions. Also, students might have censured what and how much they conveyed on the surveys, depending on who else was in the computer lab. For instance, if students were sitting beside or near their bully, they may have been more cautious in offering honest and thorough answers. Such limitations are beyond the control of the survey designers, though future implementation of surveys might consider various influences that may affect respondents' ability to remain honest and open in their answers.

The dataset was composed of a large sample (N=13,177) and it was not feasible for me to examine elementary, middle, and high school responses for this study. Therefore, my findings only reflect middle school children. Relying exclusively on responses from open-ended questions further narrowed my sample. This study was a qualitative content analysis and therefore, the findings cannot be generalizable to other middle school children across the U.S. To answer my research questions, quantitative methods were not required. However, my future research on bullying will utilize mixed

methods, thereby examining personal accounts and statistically significant relationships. Additionally, I focused exclusively on how gender influences children's experience with bullying. Examining other demographics could offer even more insight on how bullying plays out differently for certain categories of children. For instance, age, class, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and disabilities (mental and physical) have all been documented motives for some bullies to target their victims. Again, for feasibility, this study did not consider these various social locations and instead focused exclusively on gender.

Future Research

In light of the findings and various limitations to my study, there are various topics of interest that future researchers should consider. For instance, it should be noted that performing normative ideals of femininity and masculinity are inherently tied to race and class (see Collins 1990). My study did not consider the intersection between gender, race, and class. Therefore, it would serve future researchers to consider intersectionality as it pertains to bullying. Utilizing a qualitative content analysis enabled me to thoroughly examine respondent's verbatim text. Also, by responding to an open-ended question on an anonymous survey, respondents were granted a level of anonymity that is not possible through other methods. However, qualitative studies that utilize in-depth interviews and observation may offer rich data that addresses the interactional level of bullying between children. Such studies might consider how girls negotiate or display

emphasized femininities and boys embody multiple masculinities (see Connell 1987; 2005; Pascoe 2003).

Future researchers might also consider longitudinal studies that assess how victimization, involvement with bullying, and coping strategies change over time within different age groups. Longitudinal quantitative studies may offer especially valuable insight into understanding the long-term effects of the interplay between the perceived severity and types of bullying (i.e. physical or relational) with reported coping strategies used.

Another key role in deterring future incidences of bullying is the role of an active bystander (see Berkowitz 2014). Onlookers of bullying can either intervene and help the situation by defending the victim, ignoring the situation and walking away (bystanders), or exacerbate the situation by siding with the bully (Salmivalli 2010). Onlookers can also be victims indirectly, since they witness accounts of victimization and may not react due to fear of becoming a direct victim herself or himself. Previous studies have explored the role of onlookers and have found that children who side with the victim have a positive effect on eradicating future episodes of bullying (for examples, see Sullivan 2011 and Hawkins, Pepler and Craig 2001). Future studies should examine how gender, class, and race influence one's likelihood to be an active bystander. Educators and school officials may consider how to support onlookers to take an active role.

To adequately address bullying in schools, we must recognize that bullying (like any deviant act) is a systematic problem. Girls are often teased because of their appearance and their sexual behavior is often scrutinized. This is indicative of the overabundance of images in media that tell girls and women that their self-worth is based

on their looks and mixed messages in media tell girls to look sexy but not sexually active. Boys are teased for displaying any feminine characteristics, because homophobia remains a widespread problem and feminine traits are ranked below masculine traits. Similarly, when we consider the frequency of violence portrayed in media, especially men asserting their strength and control through physical means, it is not entirely surprising to note the tendency of boys using overt forms of bullying. Children are not likely to stop bullying if they routinely receive messages that reinforce racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, or xenophobia. Therefore, to eradicate or at least decrease bullying we must consider how our culture might move away from valuing competition, homogeneity, and social ranking, and instead foster a sense of connectedness, mutual respect, and celebrated diversity. While this is a grand aim and unlikely to come to fruition within our lifetime, small efforts can be made. Starting with individual schools is a "grounds up" approach and while it will not change bullying trends at the national level, small and fruitful gains can be achieved by first focusing on mirco-level interactions. Specifically, promoting healthy school climates may be one salient way that students learn to appreciate diversity, gain self-confidence, and self-efficacy, and thereby minimizing the tolerance for bullying.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTE REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB USE ONLY	*Excluded from IRB Review*	*Date:* 1/21/14

RECEIVED JAN 1 2 2014

Registration Form

Please complete this form if you propose to conduct a project that involves interaction/intervention with or collection of information from individuals that meets one or more of the criteria below. IRB review is not required because:

- ☐ The project does not meet the Common Rule definition of research.
- ☐ The project does not collect information "about" the individuals with whom the researcher is interacting.
- ☐ Results will be shared only with the client or stakeholder(s) for private use for evaluation of an established program or for other non-research purposes.
- ☒ The project utilizes only data from secondary sources that are not individually identifiable.
- ☐ The project is an internal evaluation intended for quality control of ongoing program only.
- ☐ The project involves only oral history activities, such as open ended interviews, that ONLY document a specific event, or the experiences of individuals without intent to draw conclusions, generalize findings, or influence policy or practice.

Project Title:	Bullying and Victimization: How Girls and Boys Experience, Cope, and Resist Forms of Bullying Differently (tentative title)
Principal Investigator (PI):	**Nicole Lise Rosen** — Cert 9-16-10
PI Department:	**Sociology**
PI Phone & email:	**nlr27@zips.uakron.edu 814.932.3566**
Co-Investigators (list all co-investigators):	**Charisee Nixon, PhD** — Not UA - Cert 3-16-10
Faculty Advisor (if PI is a student):	**Stacey Nofziger, PhD** — Cert 3-16-10

Provide below a brief description of the purpose of this study and the type and source of the information on individuals that you will use. (The space will expand as you type.)
I will be using a secondary data source, The Youth Voice project (headed by Dr. Charisse Nixon at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College) to explore how girls and boys experience bullying differently. The Youth Voice Project is a large-scale research project that focuses on student perceptions of bullying and mistreatment in school. Twenty-five schools in 12 states completed the on-line survey (N=11,893). Over 13,000 students, grades 5 through 12, participated on the on-line survey which included closed and open formatted questions. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the open ended questions posed to students. My goal is to discern how different students (based on their sex, nationality, size, sexual orientation, and social class) experienced bullying differently, as well as understand how students respond and prevent cases of bullying amongst their peers.

Investigator's Assurance

I certify that the information provided in this Registration Form is complete and accurate. I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the ethical conduct of this project.

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: 1/15/14

Faculty Advisor's Assurance

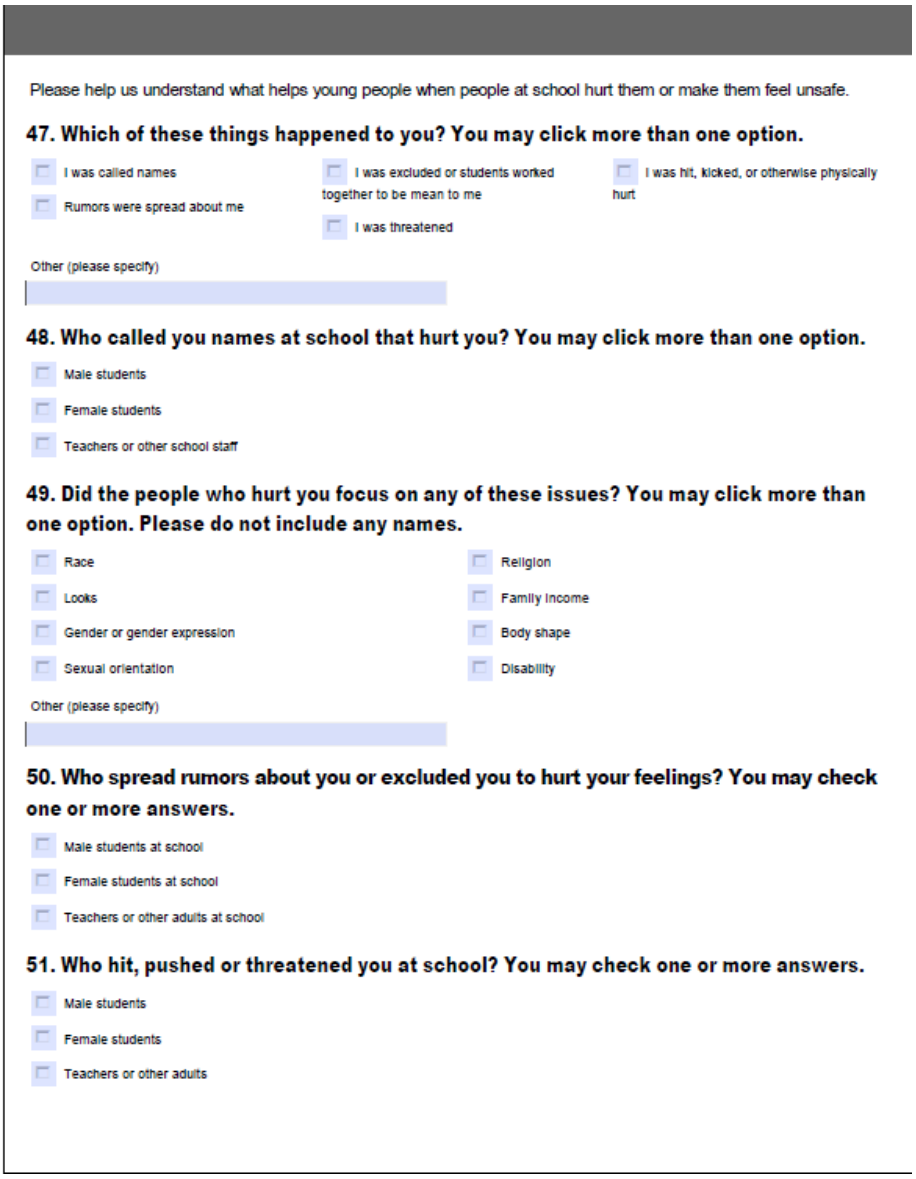
I certify that the student is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing the research and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study.

Faculty Advisor: _____ Date: 1-18-14

The University of Akron Institutional Review Board — Approved 02/08

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS 47-51



Please help us understand what helps young people when people at school hurt them or make them feel unsafe.

47. Which of these things happened to you? You may click more than one option.

- I was called names
- Rumors were spread about me
- I was excluded or students worked together to be mean to me
- I was threatened
- I was hit, kicked, or otherwise physically hurt

Other (please specify)

48. Who called you names at school that hurt you? You may click more than one option.

- Male students
- Female students
- Teachers or other school staff

49. Did the people who hurt you focus on any of these issues? You may click more than one option. Please do not include any names.

- Race
- Looks
- Gender or gender expression
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Family income
- Body shape
- Disability

Other (please specify)

50. Who spread rumors about you or excluded you to hurt your feelings? You may check one or more answers.

- Male students at school
- Female students at school
- Teachers or other adults at school

51. Who hit, pushed or threatened you at school? You may check one or more answers.

- Male students
- Female students
- Teachers or other adults

APPENDIX C

QUESTION 55

55. Did you do any of these things about what was done to you? What helped? Please click one option for each action.

	I didn't do this	I did this and things got worse	I did this and things didn't change	I did this and things got better
Pretended it didn't bother me	◯	◯	◯	◯
Reminded myself that what they are doing is not my fault and that THEY are the ones who are doing something wrong.	◯	◯	◯	◯
Made plans to get back at them or fight them	◯	◯	◯	◯
Hit them or fought them	◯	◯	◯	◯
Told the person or people to stop	◯	◯	◯	◯
Did nothing	◯	◯	◯	◯
Told the person or people how I felt about what they were doing	◯	◯	◯	◯
Walked away	◯	◯	◯	◯
Told an adult at school	◯	◯	◯	◯
Told an adult at home	◯	◯	◯	◯
Told a friend(s)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Made a joke about it to help myself feel better	◯	◯	◯	◯
Made a joke about it to stop the other person from teasing me	◯	◯	◯	◯